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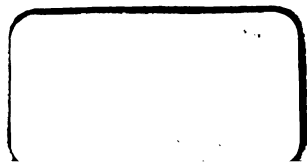
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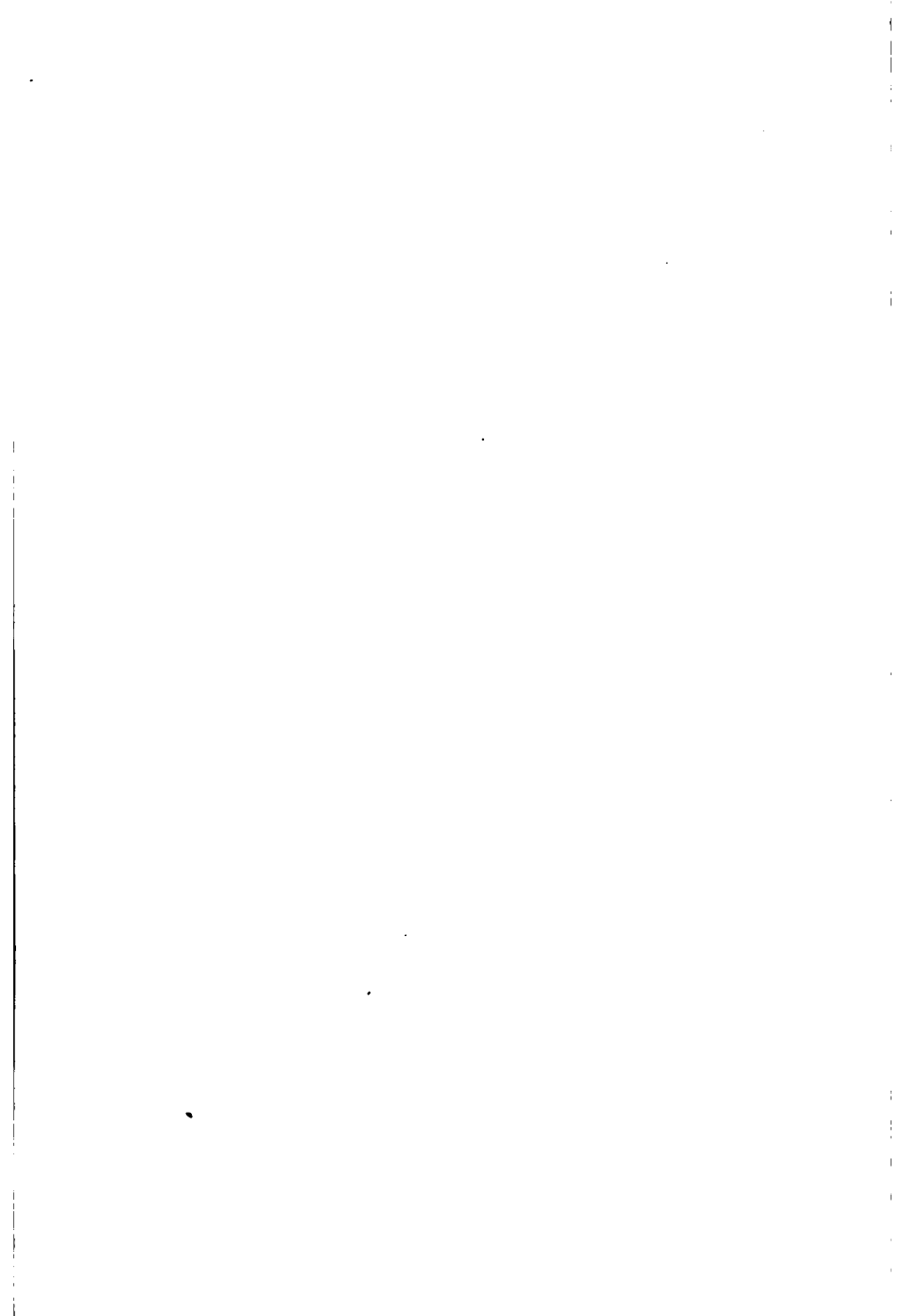
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The House of Silence



The House of Silence

By

GORDON HOLMES [pseud.]

Author of

"The de Beroy Affair," "By Force of Circumstances," etc.

By [Louis Tracy,] 1863-1928.

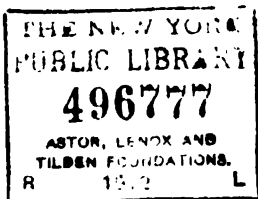


New York

Edward J. Clode

Publisher

M.E.T.



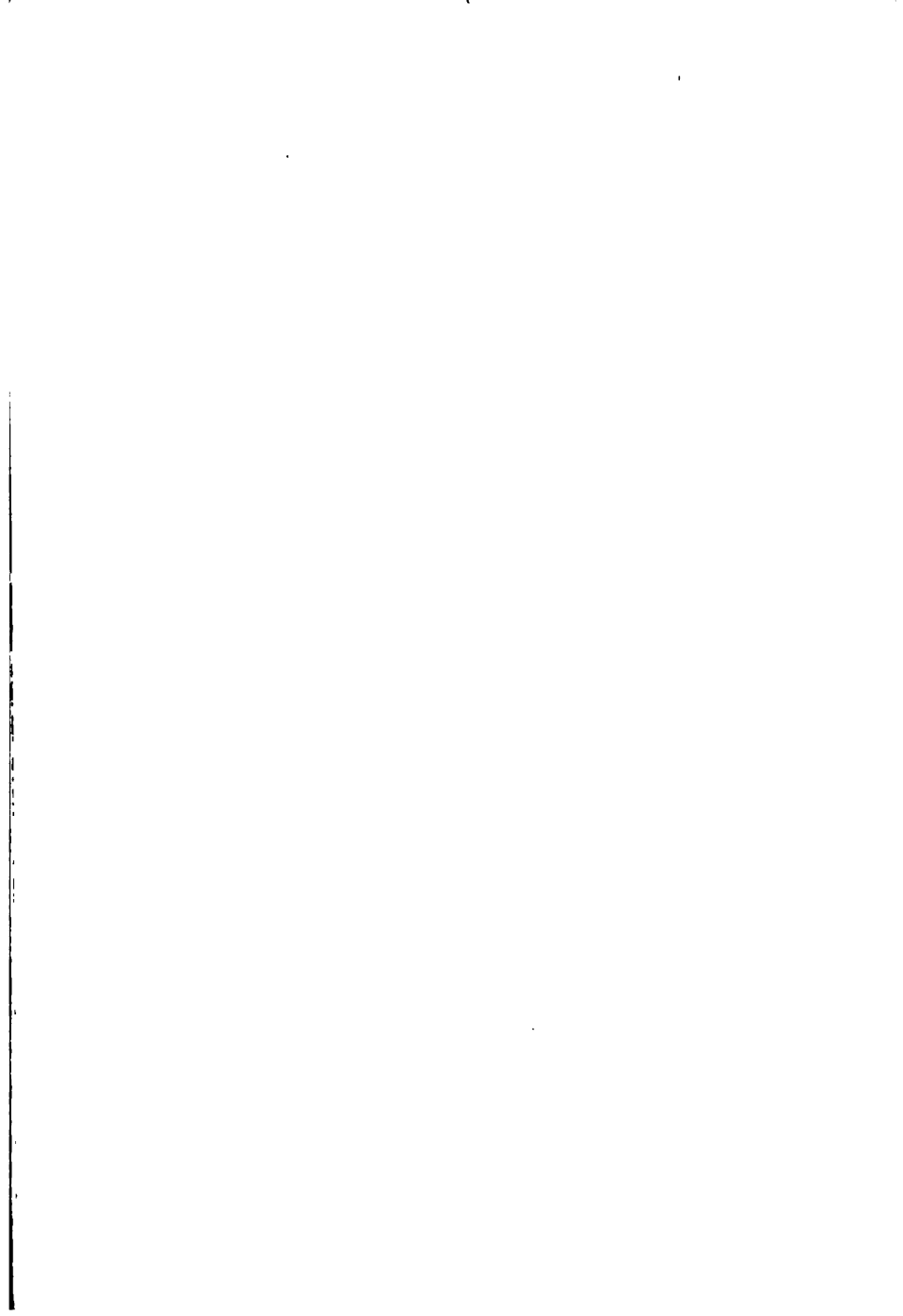
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THE HOUSE OF SILENCE

CHAPTER I

THE MAN ON THE SCAR

WILLIAM HEWINS, coastguard, once chief boatman and gunlayer of the *Arrogant*, stood looking seaward with a fixed gaze. From that height, on a fine day, he could survey a horizon of twenty miles, but in these secret hours, with a half-moon moving slowly behind clouds, the sea spread a black veil across the face of the world.

Yet a sailor's eyes could see a little into the darkness, and Hewins saw something that puzzled him.

"Now, I wonder who *that* blighter is, an' wot he thinks he's a-doin' of!" he muttered, in the full and free language of the fleet.

For it was two in the morning; and the presence of a boat out there in the lonely night—a boat heading shoreward at a point where the worst "steel" on the Yorkshire coast spread its coat of mail in front of the sands—was a thing to make a man stare.

Black Scar "steel" had an evil repute, and

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though there was a lane through its jagged intricacies, Hewins knew that none save a fool or a salmon-poacher would attempt the passage on a dark night, since the merest curl on the waves rendered approach to it dangerous even in daylight. So, after satisfying himself that the boat was really being pulled across the reef, he hurried down the steep path that ran from the top of the cliff to the carriage-road beneath.

Before reaching the lower road he twice again spied the boat. Then the white mass of Beach House, perched at the end of a short promontory, or "nab," shut it out of sight; but in those two glimpses he had seen a lowered sail, and the phosphorescent sheen of a pair of oars. A dog barked from the courtyard of Beach House as Hewins drew near, but quieted down when he leaped to the sands. Otherwise all was still.

He walked seaward round the base of the sheer rock that lifted the silent house some sixty feet above high-water mark. When he next sighted the boat, she had swung broadside on, and he now saw that she held but one man, and was no fishing coble, but a lighter craft, built for pleasure. He lurked under the shadow of the rock until the man, who must have been a native of this rock-bound coast, and one well skilled in the ways of the sea, had unshipped an oar in order to drive the boat's prow into the sand amid the last ripples of the tide.

Then Hewins stepped forward.

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“What cheer, mate!” he sang out pleasantly enough. “Why are you making a landing here-about?”

Now, such light as there was came from the north-east, and the oarsman’s face was turned the other way; nor was there time to see it, for instantly, without one sound, he just flourished the oar over his head, stabbed it into the sand, and leaned on it in a panic of effort to be off.

“What’s the hurry?” shouted Hewins again, running into the water up to his knees. “I’m not a ghost; I’m a coastguard—you monkey-livered swab!”

This last phrase was an admission that the speechless stranger had escaped, as, with one strong thrust of the oar, he carried the craft just out of reach. Then, coolly seating himself, with head still averted, he rowed away anew through the treacherous tide surging over the Black Scar steel, and was swallowed by night and the mist.

About eleven o’clock next morning a girl, fresh from a ramble over the moors, halted at the edge of the cliff, exactly where Hewins had stood nine hours earlier. On such a day, and in such a world of sunlit sea and far-flung coastline, it was good to be alive and young, and Eunice Lowther’s frame tingled with the joy of it.

But her rapt gaze did not dwell long on the familiar scene, for she was late; and, with her com-

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panion, the fox-terrier whose bark had marked the coastguard's descent to the sands, she was soon racing down the cliff-path at a pace that demanded a sure eye and steady foot. Girl and dog sped along a causeway that carried the carriage-road from the south to Beach House, entered by a postern-door a courtyard whose great gates barred the dwelling from envious eyes, and so into a kitchen which might have been the pride of some old abbey, because of its blackened beams and ample space.

"Thank goodness, I am in time," said Eunice cheerfully to a stout cook and a parlor-maid, throwing aside her gauntlets and stick; "Jock and I had such a scamper over the moors. Has uncle asked for me?"

"No, miss," the parlor-maid answered. "I gave an eye to the fire about half-past ten, and Mr. Storm seemed quite comfortable."

"Is the beef-tea ready, Mrs. Jackson?" Eunice asked.

For answer the cook skillfully poured a savory compound from an enameled pot into a cup, and the girl passed with it on a tray into the dim interior of the house, traversing a long corridor, into which four rooms opened on right and left. At the farther end an oak staircase climbed to the next floor; but at the half-landing she passed through a door of frosted glass into a chamber so spacious and lofty that the structure of the rest of the house had evidently been subordinated to it. This room was

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shaped like a half-moon curved toward the sea, thus affording the utmost amplitude of view, since it commanded the whole sweep of coast to north and south, though its general aspect was to the east and seaward. The ceiling, carried on stanch oak beams, sloped down from the inner wall to an array of mulioned windows that ran round the half-circle, and the amount of light thus admitted was surprising after the gloom of the interior. Perhaps the peculiar shape of the apartment was explained by the appearance of a man who lay in the center stretched on a raised couch, which was equipped with appliances for tilting it in any direction.

He was an old man, white-haired, and worn, with a total absence of expression, save in the eyes, which alone of him seemed alive. Eunice was skilled in their language, for at once, with a bright smile, she said:

“You were wondering what had become of me, I see.”

Placing the tray on a swinging table, she manipulated screws and levers till the invalid was fixed in the right position. Then she tenderly lifted his head, guided the palsied hands to spoon and cup, and began an entirely one-sided conversation:

“Jock and I had such a ramble! He chased rabbits galore, and wanted to flush the grouse, until I told him that he ought to know better. . . . Yes, it will be a good year on the moor—plenty of young heather—no heavy rain—Wilkins says there

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are no dead birds, and the young broods are strong on the wing. . . . I hope the chill will soon be out of the air. On the first day of real summer I'll take you in the car to Sandyside Nab, for Wilkins is having the ruts filled on the moor-road, so that the car can travel without jolting. . . ."

A flicker of animation had come into the invalid's wan features at her flow of talk, and his tongue babbled a few sounds, which the girl seemed to understand as well as if they had been articulate.

"No," she answered instantly, "nothing has been done yet in the matter of Benson's farm. Mr. Spender says he is a worthless fellow, but perhaps he will be frightened now that you have refused to renew his lease."

Again the old man gurgled something mystical, but Eunice, reading his expression and the movements of his lips in a way known only to herself, wonderfully understood.

"Oh, yes," she said, "the sheep-sales yesterday were excellent, so I suppose that——"

But she was stopped by seeing his eyes become fixed, while his face twitched, and a convulsive movement shook his thin body. Following the direction of his gaze, she looked through an open casement that commanded a view of the Black Scar reef.

For a moment she was startled.

The tide was now running in with an energy that rendered the passage between the rocks quite impracticable, yet a small sailing-boat was apparently

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heading for its outer opening, and it was this that had agitated David Storm. However, as the two watched, the boat tacked away into deep water; but still the man and the girl kept gazing fixedly at it, until suddenly Eunice seemed to answer an unspoken question.

“No,” she said, “it is not anybody coming here, uncle. You must not begin to imagine things——”

A gurgle came from his throat, such as might squeak from the gullet of a mummy attempting to speak. Yet she understood.

“Your son?” she inquired softly. “You expect him to come back to you across the sea by the way he left you? Is that it? Yes, I know. But that is not *he!*—don’t be agitated—that is a much younger man than your son would be by this time. He is an artist whom I have seen sketching on the moor above Eskmouth. Now, try and sleep a little before lunch. Shall I draw the blinds? Are you sure the glare is not too much for you? Well, but please do close your eyes. That is not he.”

She settled him comfortably, and David Storm’s eyes closed, whereupon Eunice walked to a window to look at the boat, the occupant of which was a young man in flannels.

Near the headland a mile to the south, a brook, or “beck,” emptied itself into the sea, and she fancied now that he meant to land at that point—in ignorance, probably, of the fact that the tiny bar in front of the beck fretted the sea in the then

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condition of wind and tide—at which ignorance she smiled a little to herself, thinking that the stranger's spotless flannels and straw-hat would probably be drenched ere he shot into smooth water.

Her thoughts, however, were turned from the boat by the appearance of another man, also in flannels and straw-hat, on the sands directly under her. A smiling frown, a slight blush, showed that this new apparition was not altogether unexpected nor wholly desired. She threw a glance at the form on the couch, scrutinized the pallid face so deathlike in its repose, and hurried out on tiptoe.

Whistling the dog in the courtyard, she passed along the causeway, and at the narrow, low neck of the Nab, leaped down to the shore, just where Coast-guard Hewins had reached it the night before. Like him, she crossed the sands under the wall of rock that rose even higher as she neared the sea.

She was greeted with an exaggerated hat-flourish. The man had run to meet her, causing Jock to growl.

“Evidently,” he said, as he shook hands, “you possess the virtue of punctuality, so rare among women.”

“I have a confession to make, Mr. Storm,” she began, collectedly enough, though not without a slight nervousness and heightened color that were quickly noted by the eyes now devouring her rare beauty of face and figure: “I—quite forgot that you said you were coming here to-day. I'm—afraid

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my 'punctuality' is due to the chance of my having looked at that boat out there a minute ago."

"Ah, now you are cruel."

"No, merely candid. You should like me for that."

"For that, and for——" He was about to say "for all," but was stopped by her anxious half-laugh, and her obvious interest in the tacking boat.

"What in the world is he doing?" she cried, her eyes fixed on the fluttering sail. "He will strike the reef, if he . . ."

The words fell away on her lips, since the yachtman, daunted perhaps by the broken water of the beck's estuary, was now running before the wind back to Eskmouth.

The man with her, who bore the same surname as the invalid dozing in the glass-cased room above, gave but one glance at the boat, and then glowered at Eunice with a sudden blaze of desire in his swarthy visage. He was tall and straight, loose-limbed, with a certain ruthless vigor in every line of face and frame. Eyes, mouth, and chin bore witness of grim force, whether for good or ill. The resolute set of the shoulders, the square bony wrists, the big hands with their fingers clenched, a habit of standing with rigid knees on feet planted well apart, all told the same tale of strength and will. As he stood there, looking at the fair girl, who rather shrank from him, he resembled some truculent corsair rather than

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a well-dressed Englishman trying to find words pleasing to the ear of a fair lady.

And the dog seemed to be aware of the singular aspect of this would-be wooer: he growled again, baring his teeth.

“Do be quiet, Jock!” said his mistress. “One might think you had never seen Mr. Storm before.”

“Jock is really quite justified,” said Storm, and the girl’s surprised glance just caught the last gleam of that passionate expression. “Yes, he can read character. Every dog worth a collar can do that. He understands exactly why I am here to-day: and he is—jealous.”

Some of the color ebbed from Eunice’s cheeks, but she bravely ignored his meaning.

“Well—but—we must be parting now,” she said. “I have so many things to attend to before lunch——”

The man moved slightly, as though to prevent her escape.

“No, you cannot go before you have heard what I came here to say!” he cried. “Eunice, your woman’s heart must have warned you that I love you, that you are the one girl in the world for me. Oh, I am not a troubadour—I can’t say sweet things sweetly—but—I can say what I mean. . . . Eunice, will you marry me?”

He did not touch, or try to touch her, so great was his self-control, but his dark eyes reddened, his

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strong lips were parted, and he stood with clenched fists and feet set well apart, the personification of power, of restraint, of changeless purpose.

The girl's eyes were lifted to his in alarm. "Mr. Storm—I—really——" she began to say.

But she could not meet his steady gaze, and she looked away to the sea. At once her acute embarrassment yielded to alarm.

"Look! the boat!" she almost screamed. "It will be on the steel!"

"Oh, let the bungler go on the steel! Come, Eunice, tell me—it is yes, is it?"

Now her mind came back to him—he had to be faced and answered.

"Mr. Storm—since frankness is my favorite virtue—I will admit myself as much flattered as surprised. I know of no girl hereabout who would probably decline the honor you offer——"

"What, a 'but'?" he said, low, smiling, sure of conquest.

"Yes, a 'but,'" she answered with a bend of the head, and with increasing calmness. "You seem to forget the obstacles that stand in the way. I am not as other girls. I am the adopted niece of my uncle, and—of yours."

He laughed lightly. "That is just the point," he said. "You are *not* the niece of your uncle. As I understand it, you are the daughter of two friends of my uncle, who died suddenly together in India, and my uncle took you to his heart—small blame

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to him. That makes you his daughter, not his niece. Your name is Lowther, mine is Storm. What, then, have you to do with the old, old feud between my father and your so-called 'uncle,' since you are not one of the family? No, don't bring that in, now. Say *yes*. Let me deal with difficulties."

He almost whispered the last words, his face near to hers. Eunice was looking down at her clenched hands, but she forced herself to speak composedly.

"Really, Mr. Storm, you compel admiration of the way in which you make light of obstacles. I take it that you have a very strong will, and make straight for your object. You say, like Mirabeau, 'don't mention to me that silly word "impossible."' But just let us reason a little. The feud between your father and my guardian was no ordinary feud—oh, it went deep! Through that feud my guardian and his only son parted—how deep it went you know as well as I. And there are wounds that nothing can heal. What, then, would my guardian think of me if I was even for an instant willing to entertain, to contemplate, marriage with the son of his brother? Would he not—hate me, if he could look now through a window up there and see me even speaking here with you?"

"Still, it is a fact that you *are* speaking here with me," urged Robert Storm, never doubting the outcome. "What does that show? It seems to show that I am in favor. And when a man who is worth the name of man, and a woman such as you,

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wish the same thing, a whole world of obstacles are not worth *that*,"—he snapped his thumb and finger.

"'When two wish the same thing,'" repeated Eunice in a murmur. "Let me be frank, though, as to the object of my being here now, of my association with you since that evening of the dance at Eskmouth. I was anxious to show you that I, though belonging to the hostile camp, had no feelings of ill-will toward you and your father—that *I* was not in the feud. I wished to be pleasant. That, I think, was all."

"You only *think*?"

"I know."

"You are being cruel to me again!"

"Whose fault is it? I said 'I think,' and you forced me to say 'I know.' You bring it upon yourself!" She smiled up in his face.

"Well, I am defeated, I suppose!" he said after some moments' thought, with a feigning of surprise, for he was adroit enough to realize that his suit was prospering. "Worse luck, I am one of those people who never know when they are defeated."

"Well, I like you for that!" she said brightly.

"Hello—fresh hope! Do you like me, then?"

"I think well of you," she said frankly. "I like the sense of strength and manhood that I find about you."

"Well, that is a good augury," he said, laying a hand on her shoulder in a friendly way. "That

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is a point gained; we will make a bargain yet, and laugh at every obstacle. See how patient I am, not in any wild hurry—I give you three days to think over it, and if you are then so gracious as to say one-half a ‘yes,’ I’ll undertake positively to vanquish every difficulty as regards the feud between the old folks. Come, what do you——”

Before he could bring out the word “say,” Eunice cried excitedly:

“There! I said he would do it, and he *has!*” The boat in the offing had grazed the outer edge of the Black Scar, and instantly, like a dying butterfly, collapsed and capsized.

Eunice ran to the water’s edge. Storm stood fast, and cursed the interfering blunderer in the boat.

There were a few seconds of deathly silence and suspense, while the girl kept her eyes fixed seaward; then a dark speck emerged above the surge—a head; but instantly, while a cry was wrung from the girl’s lips, the head rushed landward some fifteen feet, as if pulled by a cable, and vanished again.

Fervently her heart was lifted in dumb prayer in those instants. When the man again became visible he was clinging to the top of a rock, and at sight of him Eunice’s soul was conscious of relief from a dire tension.

But her face quivered with distress and pity. There was little hope, she could see. At half-tide

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the sea was rushing inwards with the momentum of many armies. Within ten minutes no mortal strength could keep anyone clinging to that rock; and then—the end.

By this time Robert Storm had reached her side. She turned to him, with the clasped hands of despair.

“Oh, save him! save him!” she wailed.

He looked steadily down at her.

“Nothing can be done,” he shouted, for the sea was pounding on reef and pebbles with a continuous roar. “The reef is impassable.”

She clung to him wildly. Her voice rose to a scream. “There’s the little boat in the courtyard—if you are *very* quick—you might——”

“It is absolutely out of the question!” he cried, pointing to the lashing waves.

“No, no! It can be done! Even I——”

But she stopped, with open lips, for she had seen with horror that the castaway was about to leave the rock, probably to try to swim ashore. This meant certain death—the breaking of bones of drawn steel if the swimmer possessed them. In the passion of her alarm, she broke away from Storm and ran a little into the surf, waving to the doomed man, and calling shrilly with each hand-wave, “No! Go back! Go back!” in a voice which he could not possibly hear; but calling involuntarily, though sinking her tone at last, lest the old man in the room above should hear and be agitated, since sub-

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consciously she remembered him even in that moment of agony.

The stranger had already put out his right hand from the rock to make the mad attempt to swim, when he seemed to see and understand her. He desisted. When she was sure that he had obeyed her signals she dashed back to Storm, grasped his arm, and looked up, half-crying, into his face.

"Now," she almost screamed, "will you try it? For *me*—I say *for me*."

Storm did then scrutinize the sea with eyes that peered from a furrowed brow. He wanted to be venturesome and gallant in her presence, but the danger to life and limb was appreciable and real, nor were drowned men on that coast a novelty to one who had spent his boyhood there. He did not pretend or aspire to be a life-giving fool, and he ended his survey of the sea by saying, with grim finality:

"Eunice, you do not seem to realize that you are asking me to die uselessly."

She heard no more. With flying draperies she ran to the narrow, low part of the Nab, followed by a wildly excited dog.

Storm, turning a callous back on the man in imminent danger of death, saw her scale the rock and vanish. By the time his slower steps brought him to the spot where she had climbed she was again in sight, coming now towards him, carrying by the starboard gunwale a little boat, which a man in the

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uniform of a chauffeur upheld on the port side. They placed it on a slipway, and it came down between them with a run to the sands.

Not an instant did it pause there, but walked on seaward between its carriers, Eunice no longer seeming aware of the presence of Robert Storm, who followed her dumbly. But her fingers were soft, and, halfway to the sea, when the weight became intolerable, she yielded.

"Mr. Storm—if only you will help——" she cried.

"What do you propose to do, Eunice?" he demanded sternly.

"Rescue the man," she panted.

"You!"

"Yes, I! Jackson is my chauffeur. He does not know the channel across the Scar. He cannot even pull an oar."

"You shall not make any such mad attempt while I am here!" shouted Storm. "It is simply suicidal."

Eunice's numbed fingers felt life in them again.

"Come, Jackson!" she said with fixed lips, and instantly the boat was lifted afresh.

But Storm now barred the way, determined that, since he had not gone to the rescue of the castaway, no one else should—afraid lest a girl should go, and succeed, where he had shrunk from the danger—a thing that must forever brand him with the name of coward.

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"Eunice," he said imperatively, "I cannot stand by and let you commit this folly."

Her flushed face took on a deeper carmine, but before she could speak, Jackson, the chauffeur, rushed forward with menacing face and clenched fists, but Storm suddenly stooped with an exclamation of pain, for the teeth of Jock, the fox-terrier, had met on his calf, for the dog was not the last to perceive the new order of things.

Jackson was quick, too.

"Come, miss!" he yelled, and the boat went on with a run. Storm kicked venomously at the dog, but made no other attempt at interference. Silently he watched Eunice jump in and Jackson running the boat through the surf into the sea. Then the oars flew out like long, thin wings. The dog quitted his enemy, and tried, with a howl of despair, to follow his mistress, but Jackson caught him by the collar.

In that supreme instant Robert Storm's thoughts were not pleasant. They were clear enough. Eunice would never marry him now, if she came back.

"Ah, if ever she comes back," he repeated. Then his teeth ground together in a frenzy of passion, and he hissed: "Drown her! Sink her! Drown her! She is well out of the way!"

Out there on the rock he could see a white face clinging in the sweep of the rising tide. Between the black fangs of the reef, keeping in the churning froth, went the girl, laboring hard at the oars,

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ever glancing behind her. The wind blew strands of her hair astray over her face; the spindrift whirled over her in clouds, but she went on steadfastly, mounting and sinking, fighting the wild sea, a little thing defying a big. Yet never did she seem so divine, a goddess so much to be desired, as now in the eyes of Storm, though he crushed the notion fiercely.

“Oh, well, let her go,” he muttered—calm but pale after that moment of ungovernable fury. “She can never get through. If not the altar, let it be the grave! By Heaven, it must be one or the other!”

CHAPTER II

THE UNKNOWN HAND

THE boat began to enter the really dangerous region of a strong tide-current, and her course became wayward, with rapid swerves to port or starboard as a swirl of water rushed through a new channel or a more subtle undertow caught it. Eunice, plying the oars with confident skill, was now hard set not only to mark the changing path, but to keep within its narrow limits.

Faintly on the breeze came to the two men gazing from the sand a shrill cry from the girl in the boat to the castaway clinging to the rock.

At that moment she was actually in the last tiny channel before the outer barrier of the reef was reached, and expectation stood in horror to watch that uncertain voyage. The tide was undoubtedly rather too high and strong for such an enterprise, even at the hands of a strong man, and Jackson, the chauffeur, though not seaman enough to realize the full peril of it, realized enough to bring from his lips the heart-felt whisper: "Now may God guard her!"

Robert Storm himself forgot his own affairs and

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the smart rankling in his heart in the interest of that drama of skill and valor. The words "She's gone!" burst from his lips, as the boat's bows suddenly swung away and struck a rock on the north side. But the damage, if any, was slight, and a fierce tug at two cunning sculls won the little skiff out anew into the midst of the tumbling waters. The castaway was now hardly ten yards distant; and across that space the boat drove stubbornly, dancing through the carnival of currents like a straw riding the hurricane, never steady two instants together, yet inch by inch advancing as she danced—steadfast, if not steady, a rock in purpose though a feather in the grasp of the elemental.

And again in the midst of the death-struggle Robert Storm let slip the words "Gone this time!" his teeth grinding together, as the capsized craft which had caused all the mischief was carried over the reef and came racing landward through the lane of rocks with her sail and broken mast dragging in the water, and as Eunice's boat shot into the tangle of the other.

Back she rushed with it fully five yards, her keel showing astern, her port bow almost submerged, the starboard oar struggling vainly within the canvas folds that lay half-under the keel. If Eunice had not had the quickness and knowledge to throw herself promptly to the port gunwale at the instant that the unlooked-for catastrophe came upon her, the boat must have capsized. Indeed, it was no wit

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or skill of the girl's that saved her now, but a piece of sheer luck, for the starboard oar, in its struggles, by chance disengaged a rope that held the mass of canvas and rigging; in another moment she was free; and in another the castaway's yawl was smashed like an eggshell on a spar of rock, and sank.

And anew Eunice went forward on her adventurous way; and now even from the distance of the beach it could be seen that her whole being was laboring in the deathly effort, knowing that every few seconds made so terrible a difference, since the man she would rescue might be swept off by any wave that thundered onto the reef.

"She ought to turn and run *now*," muttered Robert Storm. Jackson, with his hands plucking at his hair, his eyes staring out of his head, heard him and scoffed hysterically: "No fear! She's got the pluck of a dozen like you!"

Most certainly Eunice did not "turn and run." Presently, rowing less strongly, just strongly enough to keep the boat steady, she was crying to the castaway "Now! Now!" without looking at him, but, as though she had eyes in the back of her head, and wrists of steel, holding the bow steadily within his reach.

And when he had made the leap, and his right hand was safely lodged on the gunwale, Eunice, with never a glance at him, as if she knew instinctively that he was there and safe, began, without turning, to paddle a little, coming shoreward on the flow of

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the sea, with nice guidance by the oars down the winding lane of rocks. And as she came nearer, pushing at the oars, there occurred in Robert Storm's mind the fantasy that she was bowing many times, ironically, at him.

It was only when she was clear of the farthest and most threatening tide-race that, without looking round, she said to the man she had saved:

"Are you all right?"

But he made no answer. He could not. She did not know yet that the life was all but knocked out of him. Soon Dick Jackson was rushing to meet his mistress, standing up to his knees in the water, while tears of joy mingled hot in his eyes with the scourging spindrift. At last he caught the stern of the boat and drew it on to the firm sand with a mighty heave. Then he found breath.

"Miss Eunice!" he gasped.

But his adoration was cut short by the necessity to uphold the rescued man, who, with a last effort to reach safety, had fallen forward over the boat's bows. Jackson caught him before he could roll back into the cheated sea, and Eunice sprang out, flushed and wiping her face and tangled hair. She ran at once to help Jackson, who was upholding the stranger.

"You pull the boat farther up, and I'll see to him," she said coolly, as though she was just landing from a fishing excursion.

Robert Storm's help was not even asked; noth-

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ing was said to him; and he said nothing. His eyes were fixed in a sullen underlook upon Eunice's hot face, upon her flustered hair—and venom and hate mingled with his love as he thought: "I shall own you yet, all of you—body and soul."

Then he glanced at the limp stranger, and instantly disliked him—as was natural—for it was not pleasant to contemplate that the story of his, Storm's, refusal to go to the rescue, because it was "impossible," might get abroad. The greater the heroism of Eunice appeared to the world, the greater would appear Storm's cowardice; and, since this would be due to the stranger's coming, in that moment Storm detested him—especially as he knew in himself that he was no coward, even though disinclined to risk his skin for the good of other people.

The newcomer was not a small man—though, in comparison with Storm, he looked smaller than he was. Apparently, he was supple and sinewy beyond the common order. Though drenched and utterly collapsed, his brown hair had a glint of gold in it, nor had he wholly lost a certain boyishness of air, even now when the fresh tint of his face was of the pallor of death.

He could hardly stand, though supported on the left arm by Eunice; and when she said gently to him, "Are you hurt?" he put his right hand to his ribs, with a smile of pain. A rock had bruised him there, perhaps injured him seriously.

Jackson, having now drawn the boat high and

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dry under the cliff, ran back to his mistress's help. Between the two of them, they got the stranger to the slipway and up it, through the courtyard, and into the house.

All the time Eunice had a terrible fear in her that David Storm, her guardian, might have awaked and seen her peril in the boat—in which case she was not quite sure that he would be still alive, for his agitation would have been intense.

As soon, therefore, as the stranger had been maneuvered up into one of the rooms opening out of the corridor, she flew into the great front room. There the man whom she called "uncle" lay on his lounge—and awake, with a look of alarm and question on his face; but by one glance at him she knew that he had but just awaked, that his alarm was not great, and was only due to the shuffling of the feet outside his door, which must have aroused him.

She knelt by him, put her lips on his palsied hand, and now, in a reaction from the high-strung valor of her adventure, let a few silent tears wet the hand which she fondled.

His tongue babbled some sounds. She looked up, and understood him with her eyes.

"You want to know what in the world is the matter?" she said with a quick gayety that proved our pretty Eunice no mean actress. "You heard the sounds of the feet? It isn't much. That boat which you saw half-an-hour ago has struck on the steel, and the man in it got rather knocked about

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before he could reach shore. So we have put him into my room, and cook and Jackson are undressing and putting him to bed before Jackson goes in the motor for Dr. Ransome. It isn't much—the breath well knocked out of him—but I fancy he will pull round in an hour or two. So—that's all!"

Again he babbled, and again she said:

"Why did I cry? Is that it? Why are my eyes red? Only the sex of the girl! He was rather near to death at one time—ah, yes!—and, naturally, I was—agitated. But it's all over now—dear. It isn't much—nothing to distress you."

At that moment there was a timid tap at the door, and Eunice, saying "Cook or Jackson for instructions," sprang up, and went out.

She was soon back to her guardian, whose appearance somehow made her uneasy. His eyes seemed to be restless; she was sure that he had some thought, some alarm, some instinct, in him which he did not, or could not, utter. When Dr. Ransome had arrived in the car, had seen the rescued man, and had told Eunice that there was nothing serious the matter in that quarter, she drew him in to see David Storm also.

But the doctor was jocund and breezy on the subject of the old man, saying that he was "going on splendidly!" though Eunice, with her habit of clairvoyance into that delicate life, saw deeper, and knew that the going on was only a step nearer the precipice.

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During the rest of that day she haunted the landing to hear news of the wounded man whenever Jackson or his mother, the cook, took in nourishment, or went to dose him with the doctor's mixture. At six in the evening Eunice learned that he had willfully got up to sit in her easy-chair; and she said laughingly:

"I will waste no more sympathy on the man. To-morrow morning he will be at breakfast with me." Then she broke off to give instructions that Jock should be kept in the lodge at night. His barking had disturbed Mr. Storm.

But the stranger was nothing if not sudden and unexpected. She had just reached the first stage of a lonely dinner when the dining-room door slowly opened a little, and she looked up to see peeping in upon her a pair of merry eyes, and the face of the stranger broad with a silent laugh.

Eunice half-sprang up, twisted round toward him, and so remained for several seconds, her lips a little open, smiling, while the mutual gaze endured. Then he laughed aloud, and came in; and she remarked in the back of her head that the sudden drying of his flannels had caused a shrinkage, so that he looked like a boy in his younger brother's jacket; and his artistic tie had still a damp and limp hang in its plenteous folds.

"Am I indiscreet?" he asked her; "ought I to have announced my appearance?"

"No," she said, with that vague, wondering smile

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still hovering on her lips. "You are quite right, if you feel strong enough, not to be a prisoner. Yet I thought your ribs were all in bits, and I have been wasting much good sympathy."

"It was only cowardice that was the matter with me," he said with a whiff of self-disdain in his manner. "Nothing was broken, except my spirit. If it had been you, you would not have allowed yourself to be put to bed at all. . . . It annoys a man to find that a woman is his superior in nerve force. But that is not what I want to say. I want to thank you from the depths of my heart. I owe you my life."

He put out his hand, and she gave hers to be warmly clasped, and held some moments. His earnestness embarrassed her.

"I did nothing so very remarkable," she murmured, and her long eyelashes drooped to her cheek before his ardent gaze.

Then he laughed cheerfully. "It was so remarkable that I, at any rate, shall never forget it!" he cried. "Nor shall I ever forget you. If my boat's sail had upset you—if anything had happened to you, then—coward as I am—I should have gone to you, yes, and we should have lain together forever clasped in each other's arms at the bottom of those rocks."

Rather daring of him, she thought, but allowance must be made for his natural excitement.

"That wouldn't have done much good!" she said.

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“Well, it would have been some repayment by you to me for my wreckage, which was due to you.”

“Due to *me*? Really, now——”

“To you. You know how the sirens sang on an island, and passing sailors who heard them were lost. It was the same with me. I saw you talking on the shore with a man, and instead of minding what I was about, kept my fated eyes fixed inshore. Hence this wetting.”

“Then you must never gaze at sirens from a boat again,” she laughed.

“Oh, I think if it were to do again, I’d do it. I happen to be an artist, you see, and to me nothing is of so much importance as first impressions of beauty.”

“An artist! Well, then, let us introduce ourselves now to each other, and I shall then be able to ask you to dine with me.”

Her tact brought him back to the every-day world. He bowed slightly.

“My name is Jessop—Douglas Jessop—and when I have said that I am an artist I have summed up my history, for I am precious little else.”

“English?” she asked, with a lifting of the eyebrow.

“Now, what makes you ask that?” he demanded with an air of comical surprise. “Don’t I talk English moderately well?”

“I hardly know what made me ask,” Eunice answered; “some little hint of an accent, perhaps.”

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"Well, I was born in America," he said—"but my parents were English—and I have lived most of my life in Paris. So it is not easy to say what I am. More French, really, than anything by now, I fancy. But you?"

"They call me Eunice Lowther, as folks say in Yorkshire," she answered. "My trade is that of sea-maiden, and rescuer of siren-victims. And I live here with my uncle, Mr. David——"

Before ever she could utter the word "Storm," the parlor-maid, Mary, who had gone out for some minutes, re-entered, bearing a note.

"Jackson asked me to give this to you, Miss Eunice," she said. "He says it is from Mr. Robert Storm, who is waiting for an answer."

At that moment the stranger, Douglas Jessop, was standing at Eunice's right arm with his hand resting on the back of a chair. The parlor-maid was standing at Eunice's left arm: and both the parlor-maid and Eunice noted, though without attaching the least significance to it, that, as soon as he heard the name "Storm," the stranger stirred or started so sharply that the chair on which his hand rested moved with a creak.

To Eunice, Robert Storm's note came with a strange grating on the nerves, like the sudden intrusion of the unpleasant into the pleasant; and it was some seconds before her unwilling fingers tore it open. Then she read that Storm was anxious as to her state of health after her terrible experience of

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the forenoon; and, since it was impossible for him to cross the threshold of the house in which she lived, he craved a two minutes' interview with her on the carriage-road at once—if it was possible—begging her to forgive the unusualness of such a request because of the urgency of what he had to say to her. If she could not come at that instant, would she send him a line in reply, stating when and where he should next see her—to explain himself? So said the letter, written in a large, firm hand.

Eunice's forehead flushed and frowned over it. She even hesitated a little. Then she turned haughtily, to say to the parlor-maid:

“Direct Jackson, Mary, to tell Mr. Storm that what he asks is impossible.”

And instantly again, at that mention of the word “Storm,” the artist started a little, as though the mere word had some power to touch some nerve as with a hot wire.

This time his slight start, or stir, was not observed. The parlor-maid, more intent on local gossip, went out with the message; delivered it to Jackson in the passage; and Jackson went whistling through the courtyard, hands in pockets, with a grin on his broad face, to snub the man waiting on the causeway.

He found Storm as he had left him—pacing restlessly to and fro in the twilight.

“Well?” Storm asked, standing still with his arms akimbo.

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"Miss Lowther's answer is, sir, that what you ask is impossible," said Jackson, who enjoyed giving the message, and gave it with some gusto.

"Is that all?" asked Storm, bending close to the chauffeur with set face and heavy brows.

"That's all, sir."

"No note? Not a line?"

"No note, sir."

There were ten seconds of silence; then Storm strode off a little way, but came back instantly. During that small excursion Jackson heard him mutter in the tone of a threat:

"We shall see."

When he returned to Jackson it was to ask:

"Is the young lady alone?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! Who is with her?"

"The gentleman who was upset, sir."

Storm puckered his eyebrows as if to peer into the other's soul in the dark.

"Indeed?" said he. "I thought the man's ribs were all stove in to his heart?"

"No, not quite so far in, sir," said Jackson. "It seems to me his heart is all right. I could hear him and Miss Lowther a-chattering and a-laughing in the dining-room like two birds. Paint-work damaged a bit, perhaps, but his cylinders are O.K."

And again between the two there was a silence that hung heavy in the dull and windless night. Storm stood looking at Jackson, his arms akimbo,

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like a man meditating upon some strange creature. Then he suddenly said: "All right—thanks," and turned on his heel with a laugh—a laugh which made Jackson jerk his head, and stand there gazing after the retreating shadow till it vanished in the gloom of the cliff beyond the causeway, and the sound of the firm footsteps died down into the silence.

Meantime, in the dining-room, Jessop and Eunice did little more than nibble at their dinner, for the interest of their meeting was not favorable to appetite. Afterwards she followed his wanderings from picture to picture in both the dining-room and drawing-room—for there were some rare etchings in Beach House, and some Morlands and William Blakes—and she listened to him laying down the law on each, according to his theory of Art; also they played between them certain cavatinas and berceuses, she on the violin, he accompanying; and she overlooked his shoulder while he wrote in her confession-album what was his favorite quality in men, in women, his favorite amusement, poet, painter; whereupon they fell to discussing all things in heaven and earth. Finally she said:

"It is time for all castaways to be in bed."

"I sleep here, do I?" he asked, suddenly all alive with surprise.

"There was not the least need, really," she answered. "My wealth of sympathy was evidently wasted upon you! And I have not slept out of my

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bed for years, till now that, quite unnecessarily, I give it up to you. However, it is too late, I suppose, for you to think of tramping to Eskmouth."

"But you must not give up your room to me? Really, I cannot have that," he said earnestly.

"It was the nearest room, and as you seemed seriously hurt you were put into it. But if you cannot 'have that,' then go to Eskmouth."

"Well, no," he said, "I will stay this one night, and as I lie awake in your room, I will thank you, and always remember you, for your graciousness and your high valor."

She dropped a mock courtesy, her lips stretched in a smile.

"I am overwhelmed," she said.

He put out his hand. "Good-night!" And they parted with a friendliness that seemed to linger for minutes after he was gone to his room, and she had sped along the corridor.

'Long ere this old David Storm had been put to sleep. And Eunice, as she climbed to a tiny chamber which she used as a boudoir, glanced softly in upon him, as usual, saw him peacefully asleep, with a night-light shining by his side.

Soon, as she lay abed, she could hear the utter soundlessness of the house and the night, as it were the voice of silence, which the noise of the great sea without made only more audible and awful. For she could not sleep—she heard the grandfather's clock below strike eleven, twelve, one; and still she

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kept turning from side to side with her eyes closed to woo the sleep that shunned her.

Once, as she turned, she whispered to her pillow:

“Yes, he is quite nice, perhaps the nicest man I have ever met!”

It was soon after this that she was startled by hearing, as she thought, a talking somewhere—an impression so vague, so momentary, that she could not be sure it was not a fancy—though the mere fact that she found herself sitting up in bed was an indication that something real had startled her. She sat like that ten minutes, all ears; heard nothing more; then lay down again, resolved to think of no one, or nothing, any more, but to seize that sleep which, till this night, had always been so near and easy to her, yet wishing that the dog had not been banished to the lodge.

This time she succeeded within a few minutes, and when she next awoke she had the impression that she had been sleeping a long time. But, in reality, her sleep had not lasted five minutes, when she was sitting up afresh, staring in terror, her ears still ringing with the sound of the horrible shriek that had roused her.

And she knew whose shriek it was as clearly as if she had been awake—her uncle's. Yet, for perhaps half a minute, it was impossible for her to stir from where she sat, there was something so infernally terrible, so paralyzing, in the mystery and

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horror of that outrage of sound upon the silence of the night and the sleep-wrapped house.

Then suddenly there reached her a kind of low moan: and now at once she was up. Within some seconds her trembling fingers had caught up a dressing-gown; and even as she was throwing it round her, she was speeding with bare feet down the short stairs to David Storm's room on the left of the landing.

The first thing that her consciousness took in—to her sheer amazement—was the fact that the old man's door lay open, and, by the dim radiance of the night-light in his room which oozed out into the lobby, she noticed also that the door of the artist's room, just opposite, was open, too. She dashed into the old man's room.

A pitiful sight met her eyes there—pitiful and sickening. Old David Storm lay in the middle of the floor, panting his last, with dying eyes—lying quite four yards from the bed, from which by no effort of his paralyzed frame he could have stirred a foot; and that he had been dragged to the spot where he lay was further proved by the prints of grasping fingers that had bruised his throat.

Stooping near him—perhaps at a distance of six feet, and nearer the door—Eunice saw the artist, Douglas Jessop, standing half-dressed, his upper lip lifted a little in a grimace as of horror or disgust. So riveted were his eyes on the old man's form that

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he appeared to be utterly unconscious of Eunice's entrance.

Nor was the dying man's gaze less given up to the artist than the artist's to the dying man. Neither seemed to see Eunice. Both seemed to find in the other the whole of the universe.

It lasted, that awful silence, perhaps twenty seconds, during which nothing stirred in the room save the laboring chest of the sinking man, which sent up an eerie rattle through his throat at every breath. Then, all at once, Eunice screamed sharp and shrill.

“Oh, God! What has happened?”

At the same instant there was a sound of hurrying feet outside, and Mrs. Jackson and her son appeared at the door, peeping affrightedly into the chamber.

Before anyone could move, before affection could conquer Eunice's natural shrinking of horror from the ghastly thing on the floor, and send her rushing to him, the dying man lifted his arm, put out his forefinger, and pointed it at Douglas Jessop.

It must have been by a wonderful concentration of effort that he managed this. Though the upper portion of his body was not so completely paralyzed as the lower, it was years since he had made so definite and powerful a movement.

And as he held his finger thus pointed at Douglas Jessop, a babblement burst out of his mouth.

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The next moment his arm dropped, and his head dropped—dead.

“Oh, uncle, speak one more word to me!” wailed Eunice, fully aroused now from her trance, and running to kneel over him.

CHAPTER III

CLOUDS AND DARKNESS

As Eunice at last overcame her shrinking of horror from the loved one who lay dying on the floor, and as she ran to him, with bitter outcry, at the moment when his arm dropped from pointing at Jessop, the flame of the night-light on the little table by the bedside quailed, went dim, and suddenly died out. After some seconds of silence at the shock of the unexpected darkness, out of it rose Eunice's shriek: "Oh, is he dead?"

"Dick, haven't you a match?" cried the practical voice of Mrs. Jackson at the door to her son. As it happened, he had none, and he raced along the gallery to get some.

But Eunice knew that there were matches on the little table, and, after three attempts, for her fingers were shaking under the stress of an emotion she had never felt before, she had lighted a candle before Jackson had come back.

And now even into her depth of grief and horror a sense of surprise intruded at the discovery that only herself and Mrs. Jackson were any longer in the room—other than the body on the floor, that

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is—for Jessop had vanished during the brief interval.

Eunice had only time to notice this strange fact subconsciously. Candle in hand, she knelt over David Storm, and called out piteously to him. Even in her frenzy and dread, she, who knew that face so delicately well, realized that it was not the same any more forever—the old man was dead.

Jackson, the chauffeur, now came in with another light, and went with his mother, who by this time was wringing her hands and lamenting aloud, to bend with Eunice over the body. He was a level-headed fellow in his way, shrewd and cautious, but he saw something that temporarily threw him off his balance.

“Why, good Lord!” he cried. “Mr. Storm has been murdered!”

“Help me—oh, help me to put him on the bed!” pleaded the girl. She had already placed her hands under that pallid head to lift it, but Jackson, with awe-stricken face, suddenly said:

“No, wait, miss—wait, please—this is a matter for the police—don’t you touch him!”—and away he rushed again in a flurry to summon a doctor and the police by telephone. He lifted the receiver off its hook, but there was no answer from the exchange. Indeed, early next morning it was found that a wire had been cut. Coming back, to tell of this new wonder, and moving lightly, his feet only in stockings, he stopped near the door on hearing a sound from

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somewhere. The two women also fancied they had heard some unusual movement in the house, and listened with that awe which any sound will inspire at night in the midst of tragedy and death.

"Did anyone hear anything?" asked Jackson, with the sudden start of a man all aghast in some ghost-haunted abode.

"It seemed to me as if the front door opened and shut," Mrs. Jackson said. By the "front door" she meant the main entrance, which opened into the courtyard.

"Did you hear it, Miss Eunice?" Jackson went on, speaking with a strange curtness.

"Yes," she said, staring at him, her voice woefully shaken.

"And where's that young man—the—the man you saved—he that was in here?" Jackson muttered.

There was no answer. The other two could only gaze dumbly at him.

"What was *he* doing in here, anyway?" continued the chauffeur, bristling with suspicion, convulsed with a sort of angry fear.

Again there was no answer. Eunice's lips parted, but her mind refused to work, and her distraught eyes scarcely saw him.

At that moment each heart bounded with a new shock at a new sound—a crack, not loud, yet distinct, like the snapping of a thin piece of brittle steel—quite a sharp little snap—that seemed to

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proceed from some point not far away. Jackson fancied it came from Eunice's room across the landing, at present occupied by the shipwrecked Douglas Jessop. After a few seconds of paralysis, due to the mystery of this new sound in the night, Jackson, his face white but determined, suddenly crossed the landing, and rapped pressingly with his knuckles at the stranger's door.

"Anyone there?" he cried.

No reply. A clock, as though in mockery, solemnly chimed the half-hour.

The chauffeur, like Eunice, had not failed to observe that the door was open when he had first rushed down from his own apartment on hearing the old man's outcry—but it was shut now.

"Hello, there!" he cried again menacingly, imperatively, rattling the door-handle in a rage, and, when there was still no answer, he turned the handle sharply, and put his weight on it. . . . But the door was locked.

"Well!" he said to himself, quite dazed and dumfounded.

He stood there at a loss what to think or do next, anon dragging and pushing a little at the handle in the vague, vain, half-effort to force the door open. He then put his ear to the keyhole, listening keenly: there was not a creak or sound within. Ultimately, remembering the first sound that he had heard—the shutting of the front door below—he thought within himself: "Perhaps he has

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run out, after first locking his door, and taking the key?

"But why? But why?" And as he thought this, he distinctly heard a sound within the room. It resembled the click of metal upon metal, or of glass upon glass; and now, grasping the door-handle to rattle it with angry intolerance, Jackson shouted the gruff summons:

"Come, mister, open the door, or I'll smash it. You're in there all right!"

He might as well have bellowed at the door of a vault tenanted only by the dead.

After a little period of waiting, he muttered: "All right, I'll have you yet!" and went back across the landing into the room where the two women cowered by the side of David Storm's corpse.

"I'm going to take out the car, miss, to go for the police," he half-whispered to Eunice. . . . "Oh, be strong, miss! . . . Now, mother," he added in a lower tone, "don't let her stay here, looking at it. And you be very sure to keep a sharp eye on that there door, to see that nobody escapes out of it"—he jerked his thumb toward Eunice's room—"I'll send the maids and Jim to help"—Jim being a gardener and general handy-man for the house, who lived in the lodge.

"Is Mr. Jessop not in his room?" asked Eunice, finding her tongue at last, and putting the commonplace question in a voice she hardly recognized as her own.

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“Jessop! Is that his name? Yes, miss, he’s there right enough, but, for his own reasons, the—the gentleman won’t show himself.”

“Won’t show himself!” she repeated vaguely after him. In another moment Jackson was gone.

As he went down the stairs and along the passage, with a consciousness of ghosts all behind and about him, the candle flickered in his hand, and from this he knew before he came to it that the front door was open—the door which he himself had locked and bolted some hours before. When he came to it he found it some inches ajar, and moving slightly in a wind which had risen during the night.

“So, then,” he thought, “he must have run down while we were over the body, and opened the door, and then changed his mind, and run back to lock himself into his room. Only, what does it all mean?”

He had no time, and no power, to think now. Never did he set his car in motion in such a flurry of quickness; and in an incredibly brief time he was away, capless and lamplless.

From the causeway he ran southward along the carriage-road by the shore till it led him pretty steeply up the cliffs to the Eskmouth Road, that followed the top of the cliff, where he turned due north to race for Eskmouth. The wind was in his face as he raced. There was no sign of the moon that lay buried somewhere behind a whole heavenly

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of clouds. The air was heavy and sombrous—and down below in the black void the tide was rising, though still well below half-tide.

He was fully a mile from Eskmouth, passing the ruins of a little church on the cliff in which the bodies of drowned sailors were laid, when from out of the shrubbery in front of the church a round orb of light glared at him, and a voice, so near and sudden as to startle him, cried:

“Hi, there! Pull up! What d’you mean by driving without lights?”

Jackson drew up sharply and jumped out.

“Oh, thank goodness, Sheldon, it’s you!” he gasped.

“But, look here, Jackson, this won’t do,” said the gruff accents of authority, in the guise of a young police-constable stationed at Eskmouth. “Drivin’ like mad, an’ no lights!”

“Listen, man—it’s something too awful,” stammered Jackson, and he told half his story on the road, and half on the front-seat of the car, whither Sheldon had suddenly sprung, even as he listened, while the car throbbed back to Beach House, still lampless, and going faster than ever, as the road was empty.

They had come to the point of the main road where it met the semi-private thoroughfare that descended the steep cliff to the beach, and Jackson was still telling his doubts and fears when Sheldon said quickly: “Stop! Stop as sharp as you can!”

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and, as the car groaned under the grip of the brakes, he was out, and leaning over a low wall, peering keenly at something, apparently some object he had seen in the sea.

"Stand up!" he cried to Jackson, half-turning with eager hand, "stand up, and see if you can make out a craft of some sort out there. Fix your eyes on Black Nab steel, and then look a little farther out beyond—ten yards—fifteen yards—Do you see anything?"

Jackson rose in his seat, leaning bent over the steering-wheel, but, after half a minute of silence and concentration, sat down again.

"No, I'm blest if I can pick her up," he admitted.

"Well, she's gone clean into the mist now—if it was anything. I did fancy I saw a shadow like a sail, though, just as I spoke."

"I shouldn't think anybody would be fiddling around there at this hour with the tide where it is," Jackson remarked irritably, for he was sure the other was wasting valuable time.

"There are more things done under the moon than sleepers in their beds dream of," muttered Sheldon, which was certainly a somewhat unusual comment for a country policeman to make.

"So you don't know that Hewins, the coastguard, surprised a man landing at the foot of Beach House rocks just about this hour last night?" he went on, as if in explanation of his conduct.

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"I hadn't heard," said Jackson.

The policeman re-entered the car, and, with a snort, she was off again.

"What sort of man?" asked Jackson, his mind dwelling on Jessop.

"Hewins didn't see his face! Like a bungler, he hailed him too soon, and the man shoved off into deep water in a jiffy. When Hewins got back to Eskmouth he noticed that old Tom Tucker's *Nancy* was not at her usual berth in the harbor; so, as he was going off duty, he warned his mate at the coast-guard station. The relief man kept a lookout, but saw nothing, till at daybreak, he spotted the *Nancy* at anchor, empty and close inshore, half a mile to the north. It is clear that someone had used her for a midnight cruise—someone who knows his way about well—who knows Black Nab steel, for he steered right through it—who knows Eskmouth Harbor."

Sheldon, who had a habit of speaking rather to himself, said these last words musingly. Then he added, with a swift waking to actuality: "Now go ahead with your yarn. I want to hear everything while it's red-hot in your mind."

He was a good-looking fellow, lithe, light-footed, tall; with an air of careless gallantry that was strangely opposed to the owl-like gravity of the average British policeman. There were merriment and humor in his eyes, one of which was rather smaller than the other—a peculiarity which added to

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his cheerful expression some hint of knowingness. He looked cute, as Americans put it.

"What!" he cried, on hearing Jackson to the end, "was there time enough between the sound of the shutting of the front door and the smashing of something in the room occupied by Jessop for him to run back from the front door to the room, and break, or try to break, the article, whatever it was?"

"I seem to think he could manage it," said Jackson, after pondering the point.

"You have it in your head, I suppose, that this young artist killed Mr. David Storm?"

This blunt question staggered the chauffeur.

"I *may* have it in my head," he said in a perplexed way: "I haven't had time to think of it—there's no knowing *what* to think, in fact."

"The best way is not to think anything, until you know," said P.C. John Sheldon, his hand on Jackson's arm, "for then your evidence will come to be worth something; but if people go thinking things, all their impressions of what took place are apt to fit in with what they think, and they become valueless, or dangerous, as witnesses. I've seen it again and again—in my short experience. In this case, what you should think—if think you must—is that this young artist is a harmless-looking sort of individual—I've spoken to him twice—and if he has strangled a poor old paralyzed man, then there must be a big reason behind it, which we have got

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to find—a reason big enough to turn a decent young fellow into a homicidal lunatic. Here we are.”

The two men left the car in the courtyard, and hurried into the house, passing the gardener and maids left as sentinels by Jackson close to the door. As Sheldon neared the half-landing, lit by his bull's-eye, he tried the handle of the door on the right, which Mrs. Jackson was watching through the open door of the room on the left. The door was still obstinately locked. Sheldon went into the room where the women kept guard over an inanimate form.

Eunice still sat there on the floor, bending over her old friend, for she had refused to move from him—did not even glance around when Sheldon entered. He proceeded to make his notes in a dead silence, for the place was full of awe. The body lay long-drawn over the floor, a sheet now covering it to its breast, a look of alarm still fixed on the rigid visage. Even when Sheldon gently drew off the sheet, Eunice took no notice—sat as stony-still as her dead friend lay, gazing as into a bottomless abyss.

The policeman said nothing, asked nothing, but moved to and fro with the tactical soundlessness of a cat, seeing everything, examining the bed, the neck of the dead man, his left wrist. All the windows he found shut and fastened. Then he examined the floors, the burnt matches, the wick of the night-

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light, put two small objects which he found on the floor into his pocket, laid his face on the pillow some instants, measured distances with his feet placed one behind the other, made notes of them—studying the room as exhaustively as a scientist studies a new bone; and then, after fully quarter of an hour, glided out so silently that Eunice did not know he was gone.

Now, however, at last he made a sound—he tapped at the locked door opposite.

When no answer came, his eyes narrowed a little, and he called out: “You may as well open the door; I am a police officer, sir”—hardly raising his voice, however, above an ordinary conversational tone.

When only silence still answered him, all at once he was in action on the lock with a steel object snatched from his pocket; and a very short and hurried fumbling of steel on steel brought the door swinging wide. Followed by Jackson, he slipped in.

Jackson’s eyes stared in wide surprise round the room when no one was to be seen, but Sheldon’s face showed no emotion. They glanced under the bed, and Jackson was so sure that the stranger was in there that he tapped all round the tapestry to see if the man had become a pancake. But no one was there: and a candle burning on the dressing-table was the only *prima facie* sign that anyone had lately been in the room; for the bed was unrumpled.

Soon, however, came other signs, for presently

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Sheldon, bending over a dress basket of Eunice's, muttered:

"This is where 'the crack' came from"—and Jackson ran to see that the lock had been sprung.

Sheldon lifted the lid of the trunk, to find that the clothes and other articles in it had been all tumbled, both in the top and bottom compartments. Then an empty jewel-case met his eyes; and then a work-box in a wardrobe with the lock forced, and the objects inside also tumbled into disarray.

"Why—dash me—the man must have bin a burglar in disguise," growled Jackson, wide-eyed with amazement at these signs of foray.

"Which man?" asked Sheldon.

"Why, the artist!"

Sheldon made no answer. He was bending over an ivory casket, which, like the jewel-case, the work-box, the trunk, the drawers of the wardrobe, and every box in those drawers, had been ransacked and tumbled.

"But by what miracle did he get out?" asked Jackson, his broad Yorkshire face wrinkled with wonderment. "I tell you I heard him distinctly make a noise in here after I found that the door was locked, and I'm sure my mother and the others will tell you that nobody has come out of the door while I was away."

Sheldon negligently pointed to a casement window. One of the oriels between the mullions was open.

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"What!" said Jackson, "you think he went out there? And down by the rocks? Man alive, he couldn't do it! Just look for yourself. It's a clear drop of fifty feet of rock—you can't climb down there! not without a rope-ladder, or something. And where's the ladder?"

Sheldon came to the casement and threw an eye down the face of the rock.

"He went down there," he said, "and without any ladder. It can be done—by a climber. I'd undertake to do it myself—no praise to me, being a Cumberland man."

Jackson, too, looked out and down the wall of rock, and felt his spine shiver. "I shouldn't have thought it could be done by anything else than a fly or a bird," he remarked—"not that I would call myself a coward, either."

Sheldon did not seem to care to discuss the possibilities. He now stood in the middle of the room, lost in thought. Suddenly he tapped Jackson on the shoulder.

"I am sorry, but I'm afraid I must trouble the young lady to answer a question or two," he said. "And now you must go in the car for a doctor. Mr. Storm is dead, but we must have a doctor see him."

His decisions were instantly followed by action. He walked sharply across the landing into the other room, and without hesitation stooped over Eunice.

"Miss Lowther," he whispered, "could you come

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outside with me a moment? I am sorry to have to worry you."

She looked up at him without comprehension for a little while. Then she raised herself, and followed him. Her face was now stern and drawn, and no tear had yet dimmed her eyes, which glowed with the intensity of her sorrow and horror.

"I only want to know if you miss anything here," Sheldon said to her in her own room. "From this, for instance"—he showed her the open jewel-case.

She answered, almost carelessly: "Some few small things are gone."

He gently insisted that she should tell him what they were, and the effort to remember brought her back to the world, and did her good. She mentioned some rings and brooches, and a bracelet, and his notebook recorded each item.

Then it was the turn of the workbox, and then of the ivory casket. From the workbox a number of recent letters had disappeared, and from the casket a packet of old letters—and, as she mentioned this last, a low and horrified cry escaped her.

"What is it now, miss?" said Sheldon gently.

"My uncle's letter is gone!" she half-sobbed.

"A letter written to whom, miss?"

"To me."

"To you?"

"Oh, my dear, you will feel it in the grave!" she wailed low, quite oblivious of the policeman's pres-

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ence, and now she covered her face with her hands, and tears at last relieved the strain and tension of her brain.

Sheldon took her by the arm, and led her step by step to a chair. He waited patiently till, of her own accord, she moved her hands from her face. Then he said:

“I can’t understand, miss. Please try and tell me. Every moment is of the greatest importance. This letter of your uncle’s—was it important?”

“Yes,” she said; and with sobs throbbing a little in her voice she told him the story of it. “He became paralyzed some twenty-four years ago—but only in the lower limbs. Very gradually it crept upward. And it was not until five years ago that it began to affect his tongue and hands. So, when he saw that he was about to lose his speech and his power to write—I was just fourteen—he wrote me a letter, put it in a strong big envelope, and sealed it. He put it in the ivory casket, and told me in which drawer of the wardrobe I was to keep it. I was not to open it until the day of his death; and he said that my whole future life depended upon my keeping it safe. I never saw him so solemn. He begged me—he begged me for God’s sake—to see every day that it was safe in its place, because he had a good reason for not sending it to his lawyer to keep for me till he died. I often looked into the casket to see that the letter was there, and he often questioned me with his eyes about it, since

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his speech failed. Three days ago it was there. Now—he will grieve—he will be uneasy for me!”

Again she covered her eyes, and wept.

Sheldon stepped on tiptoe to the door where Mrs. Jackson was looking in, to whisper to her:

“You ought to be able to persuade her to go to bed; and you can sit by her. Try, please”—and Mrs. Jackson, going to Eunice, by dint of coaxing, soon got her to stand, and led her toward the door, but Eunice stopped, and turned her head a little round to look at the policeman.

“Has Mr. Douglas Jessop gone away?” she asked, in a broken voice.

“Apparently, Miss Lowther,” he answered, his eyes on the floor.

“Oh, Miss Eunice,” blurted out Mrs. Jackson, bursting into tears, “at what a risk to your poor self ye saved that bad man’s life this day!”

Eunice said nothing. She walked out with a bowed head.

It was another hour, and the doctor had been and gone, before Sheldon left for Eskmouth, driven by Jackson in the car, to report at headquarters: by which time he had examined all the house, and several rooms of it as minutely as those first two. The local superintendent was aroused, Mr. Storm’s lawyer brought out of bed, and the day was not old before Scotland Yard was seeing to it; and Beach House was in the early editions of the evening papers.

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Early in the forenoon the dead man's solicitor, a Mr. Rooper, was in the house, in company with a Mr. Spender, a land-steward; and these two throughout the day were engaged in long, earnest conferences, which, to an on-looker, were suggestive of endless mystery and importance.

Also, these two men were intent, off and on, for hours that day on some furtive business of their own, whose nature could not be quite determined, and which only ended to begin again. The likeliest guess made as to their occupation was that they were seeking for something: for they strayed, together or apart, from room to room, examined pieces of furniture, investigated drawers, tapped partitions; and when they stopped awhile, or met to compare notes, it was with the gravest faces and in low tones that they discussed with each other the situation of affairs.

They were, in fact, at their wits' end to discover where a will lay.

Toward evening, they were sitting in that great front room where David Storm had spent his days, gazing at the ever-changing moods of the sea, and they determined to invite Eunice to meet them. Mr. Rooper sent a parlor-maid up to her, and presently appeared Eunice in black, trying pitifully at the door to smile a greeting to them.

They led her to a chair at the table, handling her as delicately as a fragile flower, standing while she sat in respect for her sorrow; and Mr. Rooper ex-

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pressed his regret at having to worry her with business matters.

"But it is so necessary," he went on. "It relates to the letter which we have heard that your uncle gave you five years ago, and which has now been taken from you at such an inopportune moment. You have no idea at all of the nature of its contents—no grounds for making a guess? Think, now. Please tell us even your least likely thought."

"I—don't think I can make any guess," she answered, looking wistfully at the two earnest men. "He said it was most important, but told me nothing that was in it."

"If one made a guess that it contained—a will?" put in Mr. Spender suddenly.

"A will?" said she, glancing up with a dawn of surprise in her eyes. "No, I should not say that that was a likely guess. I think I am right in saying that he gave me the impression that it only contained directions as to things I was to do in the event of his death. He said distinctly, I think, that it was a letter."

"Good," said Mr. Rooper. "But tell us this: how did the envelope feel to you? Did it feel as if it contained anything like parchment—or just ordinary paper?"

"I should say ordinary paper," she answered after some thought. "The envelope was rather thick, and I cannot be certain. But I should say

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ordinary paper. . . . Yes, I seem to know that it was just a long letter, and nothing else."

"What did I say?" asked Mr. Spender, turning to Mr. Rooper.

"Probably you were right," and Mr. Rooper did not appear to be at all happy because Mr. Spender was right. "If it was just a letter, then, it was a letter telling her, for one thing, where to find the will."

This was said rather as an aside between two business men, but Eunice again heard that word "will." She looked up into their faces, partly realizing that the quest was momentous.

"Can you not find his will?" she asked.

"My dear," cried out Mr. Rooper with a flush of compassion which he could not suppress—"you will have to know it—we cannot, we cannot."

She smiled wanly.

"In which case who will be my uncle's—heir?"

"My dear, Mr. Robert Storm." He said it in a low voice, with a bowed head.

"Oh, well," she said, though hardly conning the words, "I might have expected that."

"Yet there is hope! There is plenty of room for hope!" cried Mr. Rooper, who was evidently quite perturbed by the prospect of Robert Storm's heirship.

And, as he spoke, the parlor-maid stood at the door.

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"Mr. Robert Storm is below, miss," she said.
"He asks if he may see you."

Eunice started, half stood up, looking in sheer amazement at the girl, and suddenly her face flushed. "Say no," she said shortly, with a snap of contempt and defiance in her voice.

But in the same moment Robert Storm stood in the doorway, and Eunice did then leap to her feet in queenly indignation.

"You in my uncle's house? *You!*" she cried.

"In *my* uncle's house, you mean," he said coolly.
"Really, Miss Lowther, you forget the facts."

CHAPTER IV

THE POINTING FINGER

ROBERT STORM, at present a man of thirty-five, had not walked up the stairs of Beach House since he was a boy of fourteen—even then he had entered the place surreptitiously—and it was with a strange sensation of treading, at last, on sacred ground that he now stood in the doorway, and heard Eunice's haughty remonstrance at his presence.

But he was a man of bold mind, and a strong jaw.

"I do not mean to give offense," he continued, advancing to the table round which Eunice and Mr. Rooper and Mr. Spender were grouped. "My object is amicable. Being not altogether a stranger—of the same blood as the deceased—though I must not pretend to be proud of it—still, being of his blood, I wished——"

"You might at least have waited till the old man whom you hated had been laid in the grave!" said Eunice, her lips quivering, but her eyes bright with wrath and impotent resentment.

"If he had been laid in the grave," answered Storm, seating himself, without reference to the

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others, "I should not, of course, have come. My object was to offer my services in respect of the funeral and the rest—not that I thought those services would be accepted, but the offer is a formality due from me. As for entering the house unceremoniously, no doubt as the next of kin, I have that right, *pro tem.*, until the deceased's will has been read. I presume that it has not been read already?"

He turned to Mr. Rooper with raised eyebrows of inquiry.

"No, sir," said Mr. Rooper curtly.

"Not only has it not been read," put in Eunice with a proud disdain of hiding anything, "but it cannot be found."

"What, the will? Cannot be found?" said Storm with a start, looking about from one to the other of the three. "Oh, dear me, but that is an unfortunate thing—most unfortunate."

No one answered him.

"Wasn't there any duplicate to the will in his lawyer's hands?" he persisted, addressing Mr. Rooper.

"No, sir."

"Funny. . . . Oh, but it will be found all right! You haven't had time to look!"

There was silence. The old-fashioned chiming clock could be heard ticking on the landing.

"Not—find—the will," mused Storm aloud presently, emitting a little whistle. "That would make *me* heir to everything! Of course, that is all non-

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sense—you wouldn't catch David Storm dying intestate and leaving the lot to me, whom he mortally hated—oh, that's frank, gentlemen—'mortally hated' is the word—you wouldn't catch him leaving all his wealth to me, and to his adopted daughter nothing:—unless—unless—he wished at the last to repair a little in the person of his brother's son the wrongs which he did to his brother? But that's very unlikely, I think—for we're a family, I'll admit, that doesn't forgive or forget. That's our trait—that's our ineradicable sin. It *might* happen that in the end he repented of the wrongs—but no, really, it is almost impossible. There is a will somewhere, sure enough. Look here—I know where the will is—as a boy I knew this old house as I know my right hand—the will is in this table-leg—yes, I think *this* one—Just help me, gentlemen—tilt it that way up——”

He caught up the table at one end, and the other two men, bewildered by his pose, yet with a springing of new hope in them, held the table tilted, while Storm, on his knees, loosened some screws with a pocket-knife, and unscrewed the caster from one stout oak leg, crying out at the last twist: “Just as I thought! here's the hole!” and the others, stooping as they held up the table, contorted their bodies to peer up a roomy hole in the table's leg, out of which Robert Storm, with an expression of triumph, drew a roll of parchment.

“Didn't I tell you?” he cried with a great air of

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victory, as the table dropped back upon its four legs.

He proceeded to spread the parchment open over the table, while the two men, and even a wondering Eunice, repenting now of their coolness to the intruder, came to gaze at the treasure-trove.

But what they saw caused Mr. Rooper's long jaw to drop, and Mr. Spender to scratch his bald scalp. There was nothing written on the parchment, save the words, scrawled in big-print letters across it:

“ TRY ELSEWHERE, RICHARD.”

“Richard” was the name of David Storm's brother,—Robert Storm's father. “Richard,” at this date, had been dead some seven years; and the yellowness of the parchment showed that it had been placed in that table-leg a good many years before his death.

“Now, perhaps you are convinced,” said Robert Storm, with never a glance at Eunice, but appealing to the two men. “You see now what venom is, what crass rancor is. Oh, gentlemen, men should not hate one another so bitterly as this. He knew that his brother was aware of the hole in the leg of this old table, and he deemed my father capable of stealing in here some fine day to purloin family papers. You see, gentlemen, do you? That is why he put that parchment there, with his ‘Try Elsewhere, Richard.’ Will anyone venture to say now that that old man has not deserved the bad end he has come to?”

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His face suddenly flushed to the dusky crimson of passion, and Eunice's face, too, flushed hot to fling at him a bitter retort; but before she could speak, Mr. Spender sharply interposed.

"Come, Mr. Storm," he cried, "pray command your feelings of ill-will against the dead in the presence of this lady!"

"You are right, sir," and Storm seemed to gulp down his anger while he bowed ironically to Eunice; "forgive me, Miss Lowther, though I do not see why you should care—you are not of the blood. Anyway, you understand the motive of my presence now: I am here to offer my services, as next-of-kin: you take them, or you leave them, as you please."

"I leave them," murmured Eunice, looking up into his face with a fixed enmity in her eyes.

"Very good, you leave them—for the present. Meantime, as next-of-kin, I remain here in possession, so as to advise you in the way you should go—until the will is found, at least."

"A somewhat unusual procedure, Mr. Storm?" suggested Mr. Rooper, making a step forward.

"Oh, I am not a man much bound by rules of procedure, Rooper, as you know very well. I take possession"—and he slapped the table with his large hand—"and I do it for this young lady's sake."

There was silence now for a full minute. A surge of bitterness swelled in Eunice's heart at this

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tyranny of an intruder in her old home. Nothing was said until Mr. Spender, a bland man of affairs, tried to temporize.

“Perhaps Mr. Storm could suggest some other hiding-place where the will may possibly be?” he suggested.

“Oh, as to that,” was the ready answer, “this old place is pretty full of hiding-places, to my knowledge. I will help you to look for the will some time. Only why did the old—the old rogue—hide it?”

“Mr. Storm! do remember this lady,” protested Mr. Spender.

“Confound it!—a slip of the tongue. Still, why did he hide it?”

“My dear old friend no doubt had his own motive in concealing the will,” said the solicitor. “But he did not die believing that he had left a hidden will, for he had also left a letter to Miss Lowther in which, we are certain, he informed her where the will lies.”

“Ah, that alters the aspect of things,” said Storm, with a look of interest. “Doesn’t the will lie where the letter says that it lies?”

“The letter, sir, has not been read. The letter has been stolen by the hand that robbed Mr. David Storm of his life.”

“Stolen?” cried Storm. “But from what I have been told, the old—mole seems to have been done to death by a burglar. What motive could a burglar

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have for taking any letter? And if he had, how could he know where this particular letter lay—unless the letter was in a bundle of papers which he hoped might contain bank-notes or something?”

“The letter was in a bundle,” answered Mr. Rooper. “Until the crime is fully investigated we know nothing definite. The fact that concerns us at present is, that, for some reason, the letter is gone, and the will cannot be found.”

“Oh, the thing will be found all right,” murmured Storm lightly.

“Still, if it is not, Mr. Storm”—Mr. Rooper sat down facing him—“we may as well come now to an understanding as to the matter—if it is *not* found—we assume that the fact will make no material difference to Miss Lowther? Since we are all perfectly aware of David Storm’s intentions in her regard, may we take it that this mere accident of the absence of the will will in no way affect her pecuniary rights? Is that so? I speak in the presence of the young lady herself.”

Robert Storm laughed aloud.

“My good sir!” he cried, “you put matters as solemnly as a bench of judges. Ask the young lady herself—*she* knows—*she* will tell you. Everything that I possess is hers.”

His eyes blinked with a curious cunning, and his laughter ceased as suddenly as it began.

“Everything that you possess,” repeated Mr.

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Rooper, pondering upon the oddity of the words, and looking under his eyebrows from Eunice to Storm and from Storm to Eunice. "But, Mr. Storm, the young lady does not ask to own everything that you possess, but only those things which her guardian undoubtedly willed should be hers. As to *that* part of your possible possessions, may we take it here and now that there will be no difficulty, until the will is discovered?"

Again Storm indulged his boisterous good-humor, which met with no response from the others.

"Ask her!" he guffawed. "*She* knows. It is within her power to recover all that she has lost—if she has lost it—by simply saying the one word 'yes.' Oh, I make no secret of it, gentlemen! The whole world may know, for what I care, that I am Miss Lowther's slave forever."

"And wish her to be yours," broke in Eunice, in a low, deep, quiet voice—"your slave, bought with money. Yet she was born free, Mr. Storm, and will die free."

"Stop a bit, my dear, stop a bit," said Mr. Rooper with uplifted hand; and, turning to Storm, he added:

"Are we to understand that her saying of this word 'yes' is a condition precedent? If she chooses to say, not 'yes,' but 'no,' what then? You dispossess, you drive out, you reduce her to ruin? No, sir, surely that is not what you mean."

Storm's eyes fell a moment before the old man's

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stern gaze. He was pale now with the stress of his inward emotions. Happily, for Eunice felt like to faint, he dropped his assumed hilarity.

"How do you know, sir, that that is not what I mean?" he demanded fiercely. "Would it not be better to, as you call it, reduce this lady to ruin temporarily, in order to establish her firmly afterwards through an honorable marriage, than to leave her here in insecure possession of what is not legally hers? And, anyway, what voice have you in the affair?"

"Sir, among men of honor——"

"Aye, among men of honor, and the rest of it! I snap my fingers at your notions of honor."

"Mr. Rooper," broke in Eunice, moving to the door, "pray do me the favor not to discuss me any further with Mr. Robert Storm. I should not accept any consideration at his hands, I assure you, even if he offered it——" and she walked slowly, with her head bent, out of the room into the room of death.

The face of the dead man was still exposed. Mrs. Jackson was sitting in a corner, her face all inflamed with tears, and standing at the bed's foot was Police-Constable Sheldon, his eyes fixed askance on the form stretched before him.

Eunice, approaching the head of the bed, looked long at that dead face, until her own face yielded to the strain and anguish of it all. She threw out a hand involuntarily.

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"You, too, grieve," she murmured; "you are grieving with me, I know."

Presently she turned to go out, and, in passing behind Sheldon, said to him: "May I speak with you?"

He followed, and she led him into the drawing-room. She asked him to be seated and sank wearily into a chair herself. She looked at him in silence for a moment, and the policeman bore the scrutiny without any semblance of embarrassment.

"What are you doing here now?" she asked.

"Inspector Hunter, of Scotland Yard, is driving over from Alvington to go into the case, Miss Lowther," he answered. "Mr. Rooper wished for the employment of a special man, and the Superintendent at Eskmouth has sent me here to meet him. He should have arrived by this time, too."

"I heard that something of the sort would be done," she said. "Now I want to ask you a straight question: will you answer me?"

She bent nearer to him, and the shadow of a flush rushed across his forehead, because Eunice was a very pretty girl, and P.C. Sheldon did not mean to remain an ordinary constable all his life.

"Yes, I will answer you, if I can, Miss Lowther," he said.

"Then, *who* killed my grandfather?"

"That is known only to God in Heaven and the murderer—as yet—Miss Lowther."

"Have you ever seen Mr. Douglas Jessop?"

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“Several times.”

“Well, I ask you this, Mr. Sheldon—does this Mr. Jessop look like a man who would hurt an old man to death, and steal the small trinkets of a girl who, that same day, had saved him from drowning?”

Sheldon said to himself: “She is taken with the fellow, and I am not surprised,” but he said aloud: “No, he has not that appearance, though——”

“Though what?”

Sheldon’s forehead grew red again. “Angels have become devils at times, Miss Lowther.”

“But let us be generous, till we know, at least!” she said earnestly, bending still nearer toward him.

“Well, I will be, since you bid me,” and lo! here was no policeman talking with the lady of the manor, but a man bowing before a woman.

“Let us be generous,” she repeated, “—but—tell me—*why* did Mr. Jessop run away like a guilty man?”

“Heaven alone knows why! I have asked him, of course, and his answer is that he could not sleep that night after leaving you in the drawing-room, did not go to bed, and was sitting thinking, when he heard an outcry and ran across the landing into Mr. David Storm’s room. He found the old man on the floor in pain, and as the sight of pain always frightens him, he ran away when others came to the spot—which, you will admit, is not a very convincing answer, Miss Lowther.”

“So you have spoken to him—he has not, then,

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run away from the neighborhood? only from this house?"

"He ran straight from here to his hotel in Eskmouth, and is there now," said Sheldon.

"And he could not sleep that night after leaving me——" murmured Eunice musingly, staring into vacancy. "He was sitting thinking and then he heard the outcry—I believe it—it is probable. In which case, Mr. Sheldon, there was surely someone else in the house who did what was done?"

Sheldon made no answer.

"Who is that at the door? Come in!" cried Eunice sharply, lifting her head.

There was no answer. Eunice sprang up to go to see, for she had heard a sound. Sheldon said:

"Don't trouble!—it is too late. He is gone, whoever it was. Probably he will try again to overhear what you are saying."

"Who could it have been?" demanded Eunice, agaze.

"There is no telling, Miss Lowther," answered Sheldon with a smile.

She went back to her chair.

"So, then, it is your opinion, Mr. Sheldon, that someone else was in the house?"

"No, Miss Lowther, you mustn't put into my mouth words that I never uttered," said Sheldon, the smaller of his eyes twinkling with a species of queer humor. "I wouldn't allow myself to have an opinion in the present stage of my knowledge."

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"But," said she, bending very near to him to look earnestly into his eyes, making him so conscious of the fragrance of her being, that at one instant he almost drew away in fear—"but if this man had committed, for some marvelous reason, an outrage upon my poor uncle, whom he had never seen, or heard of, before, and then for another marvelous reason had stolen my trumpery belongings and papers, and then run away from the consequences of his acts, he would surely have run right away—to London—to Naples—he would not have run to his lodgings in Eskmouth! Surely, Mr. Sheldon—come now, you will admit that."

"You plead earnestly for him, Miss Lowther, I see," said Sheldon with his hands on his knees and his eyes fixed on the floor. "You leave no stone unturned, do you? Well, it is good for a man to be in the good books of some young ladies. But don't forget the one serious fact against this young artist—it isn't only that he was found alone with the dying man; it isn't only that he ran away in that guilty way; but it is that in his last moments the dying man pointed at him as the culprit before three witnesses."

Eunice seemed to be surprised by his words. She had the look in her face of one grappling with shadows.

"Jackson told you that when he drove to fetch you?" she asked, after a long pause.

"Yes, miss."

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“Well, that is the very thing I wished to speak to you about now. Jackson should not have told you. If I had had the time, or the presence of mind, to bid him not to tell you I should have done so, and for *this* reason—I believe that his story has produced a wrong impression in you. You know, don’t you, that my uncle’s tongue has long been paralyzed? Well, in spite of that, I have known everything he has wanted to say for years—every shade of his expression, every stir of every muscle of his has been an open book to me. But *I* was one of the three witnesses who saw him point at this Mr. Jessop: and now I tell you, Mr. Sheldon, it is not my impression that he pointed at Mr. Jessop as ‘the culprit.’ I think he meant something else!—*what* I cannot dream—I was so flurried, and he so hurried: but he meant something else! Will you believe me?”

“Well, it beats everything how you take this young man’s part, Miss Lowther!” went on Sheldon, throwing up his hands with a little laugh. “This comes of your saving his life off Black Nab steel, you see—for when one of Eve’s daughters once saves a man, she becomes his mother ever after. There’s something to be said for bungling about and getting capsized on the steel, I must admit. They say that pity is akin to love, too.”

Now, there was something in the way in which these words were uttered—some yellowness of mind, some ache of the nerve of jealousy—a fantastic

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quality as coming from a policeman in uniform—that caused Eunice to sit up straight with rather an air of reserve and offense, as the swan ruffles even at the touch of the breeze. But the feeling was momentary. She had an instinctive reliance on, and trust in, Sheldon, whom she had known for two years; and the next instant, her eagerness of conviction turned her toward him again.

“You are a philosopher, it would seem, Mr. Sheldon. Still—do you believe what I say?”

“Miss Lowther,” he answered, “this case is not in my hands. I am only a common county constable—for the present—as you know well, and Inspector Hunter of Scotland Yard, who will be here presently——”

“Please do answer me. That is precisely why I am here speaking to you now,” she said quickly, peering up into his face in her anxiety. “Inspector Hunter is coming—and I want you not to tell him that my uncle pointed at this Mr. Jessop!”

Sheldon appeared to be astounded and somewhat indignant. If he was neither of these, he was a good actor.

“Why, Miss Lowther, what are you saying?” he cried.

“Yes, yes, I know you will raise objections,” she said. “But just consider a moment—if to tell the truth, that my uncle pointed at the stranger, will be to give an untrue impression—if that is so—is it not in the interests of justice to suppress that

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truth? Just think! Is it not so? I am only pleading for the interests of justice—not for the man himself, whom, after all, I have not seen five times in my life. Don't tell the Inspector, Sheldon! and I, on my part, will give the hint to Jackson and Mrs. Jackson not to breathe a word of it to anybody—only we four know—they two, you and I—so it will be a secret between us, till such time as there is light on our present darkness.”

“Miss—Miss Lowther, I couldn't do such a thing,” he muttered, stirring uneasily on his chair.

“For *me*, then——” and now, in her eagerness, her hand was holding his sleeve, and that clever head of his was reeling in a dream.

He muttered something, words that were incoherent.

“And understand that I only ask it temporarily!” she went on gallopingly—“only till some little light is thrown upon this disaster. I have an inward conviction that this Mr. Jessop has it in his power to throw that light, to explain, anyway, his odd conduct. His motives at present are all dim to us, and I undertake positively to draw an explanation from him within ten minutes, if I once get the man face to face with me. So, when you are done with the Inspector, I am going to ask you, Sheldon, to find this Mr. Jessop with a message from me, begging him to come here to see me at once. If, for any reason, he refuses to come, you will tell him that *I* shall go to *him*. He already knows, as you

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may remind him, that I am not without courage, and I will surely go to him, and wring the truth from him—yes, I will go. So now, Sheldon, what do you say?”

For answer Sheldon suddenly wrenched his sleeve from her fingers, and, with quick and noiseless feet, was off toward the door, where his keen ear, ever on the *qui vive* even in the thick of his emotion, had gathered the fact of a furtive presence lurking. He would, indeed, have made the rush a minute or two earlier but for the fact of that emotion, but for the fact of the heaven of sweetness which the nearness of Eunice, her intimacy with him, and the secret which she wished him to share with her, had breathed into his doing. Ever since he came to Eskmouth, indeed, that humorous, shrewd eye of his had been cast upon her, as upon a star walking on its way above him, and whenever he saw her, his thought was: “Ah, if I hadn’t been born under a thatched roof, *you* would have had me for a mate.” Madness, perhaps, but then all men, even policemen, are mad in some respects.

There was another pair of keen ears in Beach House that evening besides Sheldon’s. Swift as his rush was, there was no one at the door when he reached it. Quite a long way down the corridor he saw the back of Robert Storm, who was just then busily engaged in putting a lighted match to a cigar.

Storm, with a careless saunter, passed away out of the front door, as if to enjoy the evening air. The instant the door closed behind him, his saunter

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changed into sharp and sudden activity. He turned to the right, and in a few seconds was in the kitchen.

Mrs. Jackson was in there, bending over the range, adjusting various pots for dinner, though wearing her best and blackest dress. Storm knew her whereabouts beforehand, for he had seen her come down from the room in which his uncle was lying dead. He stood and watched her shiny hot cheeks some moments, and then said to her:

“Do you think the weather will break soon, Mrs. Jackson?”

She nodded, being an offhanded Yorkshire woman. “It do look a bit that way, sir,” she answered.

He glanced out and up at the sky with wrinkled speculative brows; and suddenly, still looking up, went on:

“Of course, you’ll have to be going into mourning, won’t you?”

“You may be sure, sir.”

“Well, let that be at my expense. Here you are—pocket these.” He held out three sovereigns to her, and portly Mrs. Jackson thought that the heavens were surely falling when Robert Storm became so generous.

“Why, you are very kind, sir! Though, Miss Eunice——” she stammered.

“Not a word. This is my affair entirely.”

She took the money with eyes of wonder. Still, she was flurried, and Storm lost no time lest she should recover her wits.

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"Is it true that the artist man, Jessop, was found in my uncle's room when you all rushed in at his cry? I hear that he was," he said.

"Yes, sir, the man was there—may the Lord have mercy upon us all!"

"And it has come to my ears that something or another took place then—something that looked bad in some way for Jessop; whatever was it?"

"Why, sir," she said, "old Mr. Storm pointed at him—lifted his arm, and pointed straight at him, as if to say plain as could be, '*there's* the man as done the deed!' It fair scairt me, it did."

Storm started.

"*Pointed* at him? By Jove! But—why? Well, I heard something, but couldn't quite make out—he *pointed* at him! That was it! Well, what more do the police want?"

He walked out slowly, looking downwards, as one in a dream; but outside, suddenly looked up alert, and started off, walking at five miles an hour, for Jessop's hotel at Eskmouth.

At the same moment, in the drawing-room, Sheldon, in spite of a hard struggle, yielded to Eunice's demand, promising not to mention David Storm's apparent accusation. Even as he gave his word, with manifest reluctance, Inspector Hunter of Scotland Yard, who had passed Storm hurrying over the causeway, alighted from a dog-cart, and rapped at the front door.

CHAPTER V

THE HIDING-PLACE

ROBERT STORM kept up his rapid pace into Eskmouth. His intent was to tackle Douglas Jessop without delay, having the knowledge now in his head of that dying finger pointing with terrible meaning at the artist. Storm was one of those forces whose purposes know no relenting. Discouragement fell like water from the armor of his self-will; opposition only goaded him to a kind of venomous gayety of effort; and he had made up his mind to marry and tame Eunice Lowther.

Hence, he went straight to Jessop, for the presence of the latter in the neighborhood was inconvenient and irksome to him, since he had a dark instinct that Eunice was kindly inclined toward this interloper. Though he had not been able to overhear at the drawing-room door much of the conversation between Eunice and Sheldon, he had caught Eunice's emphatic resolve to go to Jessop, if Jessop did not come to her, in order to obtain some "light" from him; and Storm's object now in going was to frighten and chase Jessop away from the district.

Meantime, while he was on the road, Inspector

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Hunter arrived at Beach House, and was led from the door by Sheldon into the drawing-room, out of which Eunice had now gone. There the two officers conferred a little in low voices, the great man from London being rather surprised at finding a colleague in an ordinary constable, and not troubling to conceal the fact, whereas Sheldon was suave and deferential.

At last, when Hunter had hummed and hawed sufficiently to render Sheldon adamant in the matter of Eunice's request, they went to look over the house together. When they entered the death-room, Eunice was there, but retired to leave them alone, going down again to the drawing-room, where she sat within the inner curtains of an oriel window, looking out.

Night was falling, but the lamps had not been lit throughout the house. The sky was covered over with low clouds, the sea was tumbling noisily all along the coast, and very mournful and strange to her in that gloaming hour looked the hue of life and the nearness of death. Her heart had tears in it; her eyes dropped them, one by one, heavily, as when wax wastes away, held steadily to a flame. The night before, at that very hour, it had been well with her. Her friend and guardian was alive, and apparently fitted to live quietly for several more years—that frail old man who had taken her and loved her, between whose soul and hers had been a deep secret of affectionate understanding. That

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hour her clothes had not yet been dry from her rescue of the artist. She had known that within a day or two the local newspapers would be crying aloud the heroism of her deed; she had been proud of her skill and courage; she had not a care in the world; the artist had peeped in and pretended to dine with her, and he and she had got through their musical repertoire together—it was all so jolly, and she had felt really happy!

Now, David Storm was dead forever, and she was homeless—and the moaning of the sea had that in it which cannot be uttered. . . .

As she so sat musing, the door opened, but she did not hear it, and it was only when voices reached her that she awoke to the fact of Sheldon's and Inspector Hunter's entrance. They were conversing at one of the tables, and did not know that she was there. Eunice herself, since she had not risen at once, did not trouble to rise now, having no reason to think their talk secret to her, nor wishing to disturb it. So she continued looking out at the scene of the twilight, her musings only half-interrupted by their words.

She did, however, hear Inspector Hunter say, in the downright style of a man who has made up his mind:

“The excuse which Jessop gave for flying out of the house in that fashion—the excuse that the sight of pain frightens him—is absurd. *That* was the flight of guilt. What he intended to do, in his first

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impulse, was to clear right away. When he was calmer, on second thoughts he said to himself: 'No, that will look like a confession of guilt;' and so he stopped short at the hotel."

The Inspector wiped his domed and somewhat bald forehead, and puffed out his cheeks, for he was stout and bluff, and much melted by heat. He had, indeed, room in his head for plenty of brains, but they seemed to exude in the form of perspiration—though in his slimmer, dryer youth he must undoubtedly have achieved something noteworthy: for there he was, a Detective Inspector, one of the famous men of the Criminal Investigation Department, an important person.

For some seconds Sheldon did not answer. The Inspector was from London, and Sheldon, since his boyhood among the Cumberland fells, had grown up with an ingrained disdain of everything that appertained to London. Nor did Inspector Hunter's method of addressing him help to modify this habit of mind, which was a weakness in the younger man.

"I see your point, sir," said Sheldon presently. "But there were two crimes committed that night—the crime of violence to the person, and the crime of theft. Now, we can clear the artist of the crime of theft, if it was he who opened the front door, and if there was not time for him to return to his bedroom between the moment when the door was heard to slam and the moment when the crack of the

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broken lock was heard by Jackson in the room—and my inquiries so far incline me to think that he couldn't have had time to return to the room—well, if we find him innocent of the crime of theft, then, since a theft *was* committed, that means that some other culprit was in the house. And if that is so, then, possibly, the violence as well as the theft was done by that other, too. I say 'possibly'; and perhaps I should say 'probably,' because there is the cutting of the telephone wire, at its passage from the stables to the house. That is the trick of an expert thief, not of a painter of pictures who has been dragged from his death in the sea."

Inspector Hunter mopped his forehead again. As irksome as running is to a fat man so had close reasoning now grown to be to him. Moreover, he could not but feel that in the alert youngster looking at him with those keen, unequal eyes, he was in the presence of no ordinary policeman, and whatever was out of the common run of things rather irritated him.

"Now, what are you talking about?" he asked from under his soaked handkerchief. "What grounds have you for fancying that there was more than one strange man anywhere in the house? Anyhow, why shouldn't the man who was known to be here cut the wire to prevent pursuit?"

"Well, sir—excuse me—but I have stated the grounds, in my belief that the same man did not open the door and smash the dress-basket, whilst Mr.

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Jessop went no farther than Eskmouth, where he remains quite openly."

"That's nothing at all, man. We haven't time for penny-novelette fiction theories."

"No, sir—that's true. But now I'll show you the last piece of evidence I was able to gather. On examining the room, while the body still lay on the floor, I found these, sir"—and Sheldon, after taking from a pocket of his notebook a folded scrap of paper, and opening it, placed under the Inspector's eye two objects—one about half the size of a pea, one hardly larger than a pin's head.

"What are they?" asked Hunter, peering close in the dusky half-light.

"They are bits of lichen, sir."

"Lichen—I see. Kind of gray moss—that's it. And you found them on the floor. Probably dropped off someone's boots. Is that what you are driving at?"

"Yes, sir. But the point is this, that this particular kind of lichen, which I have to-day carefully examined under the glass, is not common except just near the sea—in fact, I shouldn't be surprised to learn that it only grows on headlands. The rock on which this house stands is pretty thick with it; but I've searched the cliffs in vain to find a little. I don't know what impression those facts produce on your mind, sir?"

Inspector Hunter pondered it a little, and sniffed disdainfully.

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“Sheldon,” he said at last, “you have wits, I can see—and they lead you all over the shop. If you aim at bettering yourself, if you aim at getting at the truth of cases, you mustn’t be always jumping at conclusions, for you’ll find in the end that it doesn’t pay. Theories are all very well, but what is wanted to hang your man is a fact, not a theory. You want me to believe that somebody climbed the rock out there, gathering some of the lichen about the toe-caps of his boots, then climbed in through a window, and dropped some of the lichen in the old man’s room—is that it? But you found no window open, except the one in the artist’s room——”

“Somebody might have climbed up, opened a window from outside, and closed it again when he got in,” remarked Sheldon, almost sarcastically.

“But why should we suppose such a thing, when we *have* an open window in the place—the window in the artist’s room?” cried Hunter testily. “Why trouble about two windows when one is enough? And that lichen may have come from off anybody’s boots—from Miss Lowther’s, who was certainly on the beach that day—from the artist’s, from Jackson’s——”

“There’s no lichen on the beach, sir, if I may point that out——”

“But why not?” snorted Hunter with a pooh-pooh—“lichen is all about the place, if it’s anywhere.”

Eunice, behind the curtain, thought within her-

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self: "How dead against Mr. Jessop he is! And how closed his mind appears to be against anything that tells in Mr. Jessop's favor!"

"Besides," added Hunter, since Sheldon seemed to be floored by his argument, "it is exceedingly doubtful that any man could climb up the face of this rock—especially on a dark night. I wouldn't believe it possible unless I saw it done."

"Yet you believe, sir, that somebody climbed down it?" asked Jessop.

"Climbed *down* it, yes. Somebody certainly did climb down it out of the artist's window. But climbing down it and climbing up it are very different."

Sheldon's lips twitched with repressed contempt.

"Climbing down is the harder of the two," he murmured, but the Inspector, sure that he had cornered this too clever constable, asked briskly:

"Don't you see the point?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Sheldon, "I *see*."

"Even the climbing *down* strikes me as a particularly ticklish piece of work," observed Hunter, thinking he might unbend now that the other was duly humbled.

"I certainly agree with you there, sir," said Sheldon, "and, if I may suggest it, just there, I think we have the clew to this mystery, which is hardly one that will be solved in a day. When it is, the descent of the rock should be the clew. For the climb down from that window couldn't have been done by everybody, or by anybody but a climber—I

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only state what I know, for all my young days were spent in climbing crags—and the thing for us to do is to find out the one man in ten thousand on this coast who could have done it. If the artist couldn't, then he stands acquitted—of the theft, at any rate.”

Eunice was now listening with both ears, and as Sheldon spoke her heart went out to him with warmth and thankfulness.

“Well, that is no doubt so,” said Hunter grudgingly, standing up with a *phew!* at the weather, and interrupting what he was about to say with the remark: “It seems warmish here—somehow. I shall never be sent to a hot place, Sheldon, for I shall quench the fire with perspiration. . . . Yes, what you say is all very well. But understand this, that it is precisely an artist who would have been likely to be able to climb down from that window. Artists habitually go to Switzerland and such like places for the coloring and fine views, and there they learn rock-climbing—make it their hobby—think it a feather in their cap. As to making it a clew, as you suggest, how are we to manage that? How can we find out whether any particular man could do this climb? If we ask Jessop if he can climb, he simply says ‘no,’ and there’s no means of proving that he can.”

Sheldon jerked his head, and his small left eye went smaller.

“The means can be found,” he said quietly. “I think *I* could undertake to see to that.”

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“Well, you’re a fellow with no little opinion of yourself, and I only hope you won’t find it in your way,” said Hunter with good-natured tolerance. “Come,” he added, “there is nothing more to do here for the present; and now for our fine Mr. Artist—By the way, what will the coroner’s jury find? Does the doctor say the old man was murdered?”

“No, sir. He was roughly handled, and his life was thereby shortened. It will be ‘murder’ at the assizes, but I expect an open verdict will be given now.”

Again, as the two men went out, Eunice thought: “What a biased mind that London man has! It is enough to bring about Mr. Jessop’s ruin, however innocent he may be!”

She heard the officers walk down the corridor, and, as they passed through the front door, she ran out, called “Mr. Sheldon!” and when he came back to her, she looked up earnestly into his face.

“You will not forget to give Mr. Douglas Jessop my message?” she said.

“I will not forget, Miss Lowther,” he answered in a hard voice, and hurried away to rejoin the Inspector.

At about that same moment Robert Storm arrived at Jessop’s hotel at Eskmouth, sent his name by a waiter from the smoking-room, and, while he awaited an answer, sat with his head propped on his clenched

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fists, deeply seeking to solve a mystery which more and more perplexed him. Had Jessop, he asked himself, really been guilty of any kind of wrongdoing on the night of the crime? If altogether innocent, why had the old man pointed at him? And why had Jessop run like a guilty man? If guilty, why had he not run farther . . . ?

At this point in his thoughts Jessop stood before him, a manly-looking figure in evening dress, with a cigarette between his lips. Without saying anything, he bowed slightly, in all his air the very expression of haughtiness, for he had been subjected that day to interviews with both Sheldon and the Eskmouth Superintendent, and the suspicion displayed by the latter had aroused his pride and pricked his resentment.

Storm rose, strong, too, and silent. The two men looked into each other's eyes, and, as they looked, Storm's lips slowly parted, his eyebrows lowered, and for a long half-minute he stood as agape as one who sees a person whom he has long believed to be dead. At the same time a cloud of doubt and perplexity seemed to clear itself off his mind. Recovering himself readily, he smiled.

"Forgive me for introducing myself, Mr. Jessop," he said, "though, for that matter, we do not meet for the first time—I was standing on the beach yesterday when Miss Lowther so gallantly rescued you from the reef. And you will forgive me the more because I come as a friend——"

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"You are very obliging. What is it, Mr.—er—Storm?"

"That's it—Storm is my name, and yours is Jessop—very remarkable. Now, the object of my call is this, Mr.—er—Jessop: you stand at this instant in no little danger——"

"Nonsense, sir!" said Jessop instantly. "I stand in no danger. You people here seem to have lost your senses."

Storm nodded.

"I am sorry for your sake that you think so, for the fact remains," he said. "To tell the truth, though my fiancée, Miss Eunice Lowther——"

He stopped to smile with triumph at the expression of Jessop's face. At the word "fiancée" Jessop's eyelids fell a little, and his eyes seemed to gleam at the man who had uttered it.

"What I want to say is this," continued Storm easily, "my fiancée, Miss Eunice Lowther, was all in favor of suppressing the fact of her uncle's obvious effort to indicate you last night. Well, the girl has a kind heart. Old David Storm's sister, Ethel, who was Eunice's mother"—Storm never blinked at the lie he told—"married a missionary, a Mr. Lowther, and it is from the missionary, I expect, that Eunice gets the kind heart—for, though I say it to my discredit, you may be sure that she inherited no kindness of heart from a Storm. Well, she rescued you from death yesterday, and, through that, I suppose, she is kindly disposed toward you,

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and thinks there may be some explanation of what has happened which would exculpate you. But the fact of her uncle's pointing at you has leaked out through the cook——”

“*Let* it leak out, sir, through the cook,” said Jessop stiffly. “What then? Do I look panic-stricken?”

Storm was silent. His somewhat clumsy shaft had failed to strike home, but now his long gaze at Jessop's face at their meeting had given him another weapon. With a steady look into the other's eyes, he launched it.

“Still, you should run instantly from here. Let me advise you,” he said.

“How dare you, sir?” growled Jessop, who hated the man already for his claiming of Eunice, though he was apparently quite in her confidence.

“That is no good,” said Storm coolly. “Drop that tone with me. I suppose you have Irish blood in you, eh?—on the mother's side, perhaps? But that is not a bit of use—I care nothing for your pride, and stiffness, and fiery flushes. I am a different sort of man myself, and I despise these flares in other people. I want you to go away from here, and go you must. Let this be your inducement—that at present the police cannot dream of any motive in you for the murder which they are inclined to believe that you have committed, but if *I* supply them with a motive—as I *can*—at that instant your arrest takes place. And the condition of

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my silence is that you leave Eskmouth within an hour."

Jessop's hands clenched ominously, but he restrained himself, and looked Storm up and down again from head to foot.

"I am not accustomed to discuss my affairs with vermin of your species," he said. With that, he turned on his heels, and left Storm standing alone.

Another man might have felt nonplussed—not so Storm.

"All right, pride goeth before a fall," he muttered. "I'll get you out of the way somehow, see if I don't!"

He quitted the hotel, and, in going down the front steps, passed Sheldon and Inspector Hunter coming up.

These two sent their names to Jessop, asking for an interview. Jessop sent back to say that he was a free subject, was furiously busy smoking, and could grant no more interviews for that day, at least.

"When, then, could Mr. Jessop be seen?" asked Inspector Hunter. Jessop's reply was—possibly the next forenoon.

Sheldon and Inspector Hunter then went out together, and parted for the night, whereupon Sheldon went back to the hotel, and bade a waiter tell Mr. Jessop that he wished to see him privately, having a message for him from a lady.

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And now again Jessop appeared, white-faced, angry, in arms against the world, at the threshold of the smoking-room.

"It is Miss Lowther, Mr. Jessop," said Sheldon, rising to meet him. "She has asked me in a private way to request you to go and see her at once."

The quick color that returned to Jessop's face showed how unexpected was this request. There was a silence and suspense of some seconds before he answered: "That I cannot do;" and again there was an awkward silence.

Sheldon looked steadily at him, studying him with a musing eye before he spoke.

"They say, sir," he said at last, "that it was just touch-and-go yesterday morning with the young lady herself. A wave less or more, an extra swirl of the water, and she would have lost her life in saving yours. So they tell me."

Jessop looked at him with a stiff neck and a smile which meant "Don't be insolent!" and made no answer.

"Not that I imagine for a moment that you have forgotten it, sir," pursued Sheldon calmly. "I only mention it as a factor in a queer business. . . . And I may mention, too, that the young lady is in—trouble. Why, it's incredible how much sorrow has dropped all of a sudden upon Miss Eunice Lowther. Her old uncle, sir, to whom she was very greatly attached, has been—strangled"—Sheldon's

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voice grew hoarse—"she was in bed—asleep—when his dying cry startled her. And his death makes her homeless—poor——"

"Homeless? Poor?" repeated Jessop's lips in a whisper, for this man in a policeman's uniform rather overawed him.

"Ah, you didn't know?" said Sheldon, his eyes on the ground now. "Yes, homeless, poor. She looks pretty sad. I am confident that if you only saw her, you'd do anything she asked and tell her whatever she wanted to know. You see, her uncle hid away his will somewhere, left her a letter telling her where, and that letter was stolen last night with some other articles. Why he should have hidden away his will in this way is not very clear as yet, though I can easily guess that it had something to do with a family feud, a regular rumpus, that took place among the lot of them a good many years ago—but, whatever the reason, he did hide it away, and I feel pretty sure in my own mind that it isn't going to be found in a hurry, if it ever is found. So everything goes to the real nephew, Mr. Robert Storm, and she is left destitute."

Jessop passed the fingers of his right hand through his hair. He was very pale again, and seemed to be deeply agitated, so moved that he missed the significance of the word "real."

"But Mr. Robert Storm is her fiancé! She will reacquire it all by marriage," he said, almost in protest.

The Hiding-Place

"How do you know that Mr. Storm is her fiancé, sir?"

"He has just told me so!"

"He did, did he? I believe it to be a lie. Yes, you may take it from me that that is a lie. She will be destitute, and he *may* use her destitution to force her into becoming his wife—that I don't know. But you can see how eager she must be to have the least light thrown upon things, and if *you* can help her——"

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot!" cried the other, suddenly covering his eyes with his hand.

Sheldon colored with impatience, but he had gone far enough, and curtly saying: "I'll tell her. Good-night," he walked away out of the hotel.

He went thence to the police-station and at once rang up Beach House on the telephone, which had been repaired.

"Is that Miss Lowther?" he said. "Mr. Jessop regrets, Miss Lowther, that he is not able to come and see you."

Silence, for awhile.

"All right, I'll see *him*"—in a tone of decision.

And now suddenly Sheldon remembered that he had not given to Jessop the other half of Eunice's message, that, if he did not come, then she would go.

Was it worth while to return to the hotel with the rest of the message? Was it not better that

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Miss Lowther should drop upon Jessop unexpectedly? After some hesitation he decided to be a faithful messenger, and started out anew for the hotel—by which time Eunice, with instant decision, was speeding in her closed motor-car toward Eskmouth.

At the hotel Sheldon did not again see Jessop, but sent him a note with the news that Eunice was coming—a note which had the effect of throwing Jessop into a state of extraordinary agitation. He sprang from his chair, stared at the note, threw up his hands, muttered: "Oh, if only I could!" and the next instant was gone to his bedroom like an arrow from the string. Within some minutes he had changed his clothes, ordered a cab, paid his hotel-bill, packed his trunk, and was away into the depths of the country, forgetting, or not caring for, the fact that he had made an appointment to see Detective Inspector Hunter the next day.

But as a whipped cab-horse was hurrying south along the main road on top of the cliff before turning inland, there came glaring to meet the fugitive the lamps of Eunice's car. Nor was there time to turn and run, nor any lane into which he could bolt. He leaped up in a flurry to shout something to his driver; but never a word could he utter, for the car was suddenly near upon him, and the dull gleam of the offside lamp lit his face.

Eunice saw him, and pulled an indicator, and the car stopped, even as the cab ran past. At that

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moment she was leaning out of the window, and, knowing that Jessop saw her, expected the cab to stop. When, to her distress, she found that it was going on, she cried out shrilly:

"Mr. Jessop!"

Jessop's driver, at her cry, pulled at the reins to stop, but in an instant Jessop was bellowing at him: "Go on! Go on! fast as you can!" and when the motor-car slowly turned, those in it saw the cab nothing but a shadow in the night.

"Shall I catch him up, miss?" Jackson asked.

She did not answer. She sat stooping forward, staring unseeing at the clock.

"What can it mean?" she thought distractedly. "What have I done to him that he should treat me so?" At last, she controlled her wits sufficiently to give an order, and the motor rolled slowly home.

But the very next day she heard from him. It was about two in the afternoon, and she was sitting alone in the drawing-room, her head and heart full of wonder and sorrow, when a note was brought in. Her heart, that beat faster as she opened it, seemed to pause as she read it, and, while reading it, she rose slowly upright.

If Miss Lowther will send a messenger to Mr. Jessop at Hunt Hill Farm, Hillingdon, after five days, not earlier, Mr. Jessop may be able to enlighten Miss Lowther as to the hiding-place of her uncle's will. This note is written in confidence.

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The paper dropped out of Eunice's hand. Her eyes were dim with tears. "How unkind he is to me!" she sobbed. "How incredibly unkind! Surely some spirit of evil came up out of the sea that day when I wrested him from its clutches!"

CHAPTER VI

HUNT HILL FARM

EUNICE lay on a sofa in a room whose puny dimensions were a great contrast to the spacious halls of Beach House—a room with garish mottoes hung about, such as “Heaven bless our home,” and a worsted ship on canvas, and sixpenny Eastern ornaments made in Walsall. For this was the second afternoon after the burial of David Storm, and nothing had been able to persuade her to linger a day in Beach House after the removal of the old man’s body out of it. Beach House was Robert Storm’s, if only for a time. He had already instructed solicitors to move in the matter of his succession to the intestate’s estate.

Eunice lay face-downward, her face hidden in her hands on a cushion, her brain racked with the darkest questions. Jock, curled upon a rug, no doubt wondered dimly what was troubling his mistress.

Close to her head—touched by a strand of her hair—lay that mystery—Jessop’s note.

“What a tangle it all is!” Eunice had been thinking for four days, and was thinking with more utter wonder now that the funeral was over, and she

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had more time for thought. What a puzzle, what a throng of unfathomable perplexities jostled in her mind! For one thing, was not the curt letter as good as a confession of the theft of the document which "her uncle" had left her? How otherwise could Mr. Jessop, who had never even heard of David Storm before, know the "hiding-place of the will," except by having read her uncle's letter? And if he had read it, then he must have been its thief; and if he was the thief, then he must also be the murderer, for the proceedings at the inquest, guided by Inspector Hunter, had shown that it was beyond all likelihood that *two* criminals were in Beach House that night!

At the mere notion that he whom she had thought so charming, so cultured, "the nicest man she had ever met," might possibly have laid his fingers on that poor old paralyzed throat, she shuddered through the length of her frame. But, if he was the thief—and the murderer—what a revulsion of feeling the man must have undergone, that he should confess the theft!—for his words were practically a confession. He had added at the bottom, it was true, "this note is written in confidence": but what a blind trust he was displaying in her, to think that she would not show his confession to anyone—if it *was* a confession. And if he had this wonderful confidence, this boundless trust in her, why, then, had he run from her in his cab that night, and refused even to look at her in the crowded gloom of the cor-

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oner's court, where, as Sheldon had predicted, the jury brought in an open verdict after a perfunctory taking of evidence which was manifestly reduced to the barest facts by the wish of the police authorities?

And she was to "send a messenger" to him to learn the hiding-place of the will. She was not to go to him herself! But, then, in that case the messenger, too, would know that he had been the thief!—a third person would be admitted into his guilty secret!—to what end? Did his faith in her extend to her "messenger" also, whoever that messenger might be? It was incredible!

Perhaps he did not fully realize how actual was the peril in which he stood, and was quite blind to the almost certainty of the suspicions which overshadowed him.

He had not heard, as she had, how Inspector Hunter had as good as charged him with the crimes that night in the drawing-room—even though Hunter knew nothing, through her influence over Sheldon, and Sheldon's silence, of David Storm's attempt to identify Jessop in his dying moments.

The personality of Jessop, in fact, had struck her as rather airy and careless. He was not a practical man of the world; he had the artistic temperament, and, with his head up in the clouds, probably did not grasp his peril fully, if at all; a peril which existed whether he was guilty or whether he was innocent; and in all her thoughts were mingled anxieties for him, tremors for his fate, that were

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almost motherly in their tone. For Sheldon was right. In her deepest heart she could not bring herself to believe him guilty. The more her fine wits cried "guilty!" against him, the more her general sense of men, her intuition of manner, and tone and character, and her woman's voice that reckes not of cold logic, protested "No! never!"

There, however, was his note, making darkness tenfold darker; and in the end her racked brain threw the whole thing off as a nightmare, and after intense long thought, she lay there without thought.

Now Jock barked, there was a knock at the door, and her landlady admitted Sheldon, in plain clothes, for he was off duty. Eunice sat up to receive him with the brightest smile of which she was then capable.

"I don't wish to trouble you more than a minute, Miss Lowther," he said, entering with the bent head of apology.

"As long as you please, Mr. Sheldon," she said, adding:—"I have to thank you—you have been very kind and good. You did not tell Inspector Hunter of my uncle's action."

"How do you know I didn't?" he asked, sitting opposite, with his back to the light, in obedience to her gesture.

"I know—firstly, because you promised; secondly, because nothing was said of it at the inquest, and thirdly, because I was in the drawing-room when you and the Inspector were discussing things together.

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Two detectives and a girl in a room, and the detectives not conscious that the girl was there!"

She looked reproachfully, with a sort of tearful humor, under her sad eyes at him.

"Well! were you there!" he said—"eaves-dropping."

"Merely by accident, not by design. . . . I heard Inspector Hunter complain of the heat, and say there were lichens on the beach."

"Ah, Inspector Hunter has his own ideas as to lichens and beaches, and the heat brings them rolling out."

"In any event, you were very good and faithful, and I thank you very, very much!"

Sheldon's color, which often changed in the presence of this young lady, came hotly, but he was a strenuous person, and kept a tight hand on himself.

"You are very gracious, Miss Lowther," he said quickly, looking up. "To tell the truth, you *should* thank me, for the thing is as heavy as lead on my poor conscience. Just think of the consequences to my own mind in suppressing such an important fact about a suspected man. I am bound now to have a bias in his favor, for if I do not prove him innocent, I shall always feel the responsibility of having screened one who may be guilty. Don't you see, if I *want* him to be innocent, I shall come to *think* him innocent—more so perhaps than he is? Now, that is not as it should be. And suppose the fact leaks

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out, what will become of me, then? I take it, Miss Lowther, that you have warned Jackson and his mother not to mention it to anyone?"

"Yes, of course," said Eunice. "You need have no fear. Neither of them would for the world let it out, now that they know my wishes."

She could not guess that Mrs. Jackson had already blurted it out to Robert Storm before Eunice had enjoined her to be silent, for when Eunice spoke to her, Mrs. Jackson had wept and trembled a little, and hoped in her heart that Robert Storm would forget what she had said.

"That is all right, then," said Sheldon, apparently relieved, "but as to Jackson—what will he be doing, now that you have sold your motor-car?"

"He told me yesterday that he expects to be taken into a livery stable."

"I'm afraid, Miss Lowther, that the price the car fetched at the sale must have been disappointing?"

"Yes, but you are not to pity me for my poverty," Eunice said with a pensive smile. "In addition to £150 which the car brought in—luckily, it was a personal gift of my uncle's to me—I have near £100 in the bank in my own right. So I am rich! Then, supposing nothing happens as to the will, I can play the violin fairly well, and should probably have no difficulty in making my way in London. But really—I am not at all in despair as to the finding of the will."

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The smiling afterthought of the concluding words meant more to Sheldon than the words themselves, for his eye had quickly caught the note from Jessop, lying on the head of the sofa, and, as he had secured several specimens of Jessop's writing, the thought passed through his mind, not without a twinge of jealousy:

"She does not tell me everything. She asks, but does not give."

Eunice had, indeed, considered the question whether she should show the note to Sheldon, in whom she had the fullest trust. But its contents seemed to point so strongly to Jessop's guilt that, while Sheldon had been saying how strongly he felt his responsibility for suppressing her uncle's dying action, she had decided sharply against showing him the incriminating note, for fear of increasing his feeling of responsibility to breaking-point.

"Well, I hope, Miss Lowther," Sheldon said after a pause, "that the will may yet be found, though you see, no doubt, that supposing the man who stole Mr. Storm's letter and your jewelry—I say '*supposing*' that man has any kind of interest in the disappearance of the will, then you may be sure that it is already destroyed. The first thing he would naturally do on finding out where the will lies from the letter would be to destroy it."

"Yes, that would, of course, be so," agreed Eunice, "if the purloiner of the letter has an interest in the will—but Mr. Jessop could have no—Oh, I

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don't know what to say! I must just wait, and hope."

Sheldon was silent for awhile. Eunice, too, was upset by her slip, and when the policeman spoke again, he soon showed where his mind had been.

"Well, speaking of Mr. Douglas Jessop," he said, "I have come to ask you just one question. You know that he has gone from the hotel—a rather foolish thing, by the way, for he had made an appointment with Inspector Hunter, who has put down his flight to fright, and will bring this young gentleman's neck to the noose yet, if things don't turn in his favor. What Hunter can't hit on is any kind of motive for the crimes, for he has now discovered that Mr. Jessop is not a poor man—a man likely to rob and kill for the sake of a few pounds or a lady's jewels. But let him once drop on to some kind of motive within the next few days, and I doubt if Mr. Jessop will ever exhibit another picture in the Paris Salon. Anyway, Mr. Jessop went from the hotel to a place called Hunt Hill Farm, away on the moors. We had quite a job to find him for the inquest. Anyhow, there he is, and I wanted to ask whether you saw him on the night when I gave him your message, and if you gathered anything from him as to his motive for running from Beach House on the night of the crime. Of course, if it is secret——"

"Oh, there is no secret," answered Eunice, "since I did not even speak to Mr. Jessop. In fact, he has

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consistently avoided me for his own mysterious reasons"—and she told the story of the meeting of the motor-car and the cab on the highroad, and the frenzied flight of Jessop.

Sheldon bit his mustache reflectively. Presently he remarked: "Well, there is more in this than meets the eye—there's something—something—at the bottom of it all that baffles one. Meantime, this young man may be counted upon to get himself hanged by his flights, unless Providence is his friend. And he is so arrogant and touchy that there is no approaching him to discover——"

He was stopped by an uproar from Jock, and the entrance of Eunice's landlady, who came to announce Mr. Robert Storm at the door.

"Then, I leave you, Miss Lowther," said Sheldon, rising.

Eunice had sprung up, pale and defiant.

"No, you must stay," she commanded.

Sheldon smiled.

"You will see Mr. Storm with a piece of sticking-plaster on his cheek when he comes in," he murmured. "I hope that that will not take from his good looks in your eyes, Miss Lowther. No young lady likes to see her future husband's face in a battered condition."

Eunice looked at him in a whirl of indignation. Really, this constable forgot himself at times. To hide her annoyance, she called the dog, and shut him into her bedroom.

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- "What in the world are you saying?" she cried freezingly over her shoulder.

"Is not Mr. Storm engaged to you, miss? He told Mr. Jessop so some nights ago—at least so Mr. Jessop told me"—and Sheldon's eyes studied with interest the pale wrath of her face, and then the rush of dismay that flushed her cheeks, to be followed instantly by the wrinkled forehead of reflection as she thought—"This may have been why he fled from me in the cab!"—for she did not know that Sheldon had denied Storm's statement to Jessop, and that, therefore, Jessop's flight must be accounted for otherwise.

"Mr. Storm, it seems, may say such things of me with impunity," she said at last with a haughty and wry smile. "Evidently he knows that I have no one to protect me now."

"Oh, yes, you have, Miss Lowther," broke in Sheldon warmly: "more than one. I told you that Mr. Storm will show you some sticking-plaster in a moment, and the reason is that he is not at all popular in the town just at present. Feeling, in fact, is running pretty high about your being allowed to go out in that little boat to the rescue of Mr. Jessop, while a man accustomed to boats stood by, and the people say, too, he has turned you out of Beach House in a mighty hurry. So two nights ago, as Mr. Storm was passing by the Rose and Crown, a fisherman named Bob Griffiths, standing in a group just outside the bar, was fool enough to call Mr.

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Storm a dirty coward. It will be some time before he says anything of the sort again, for Mr. Storm, who is handy with his fists, was at him in a second, and got the best of it. Still, Griffiths managed to give a pretty good account of himself—and that's where the sticking-plaster comes from."

Just then Robert Storm entered, formidable and truculent as ever—and, in truth, his cheek and chin showed plaster.

"Oh, I see," he said quickly, "you are engaged, Miss Lowther——"

"Though not yet to *you*, Mr. Storm," she said spitefully, for she loathed the sight of him.

"Is that a jest?"

"Have I a comic air?"

He looked at her with a blinking of the eyes, and said suddenly:—"I'll wait in the passage until you've finished with Sheldon. Hello, Sheldon!"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Storm," said Sheldon, but, before Storm could go out, Eunice's contemptuous voice recalled him.

"Perhaps you do not mind speaking before Mr. Sheldon?" she said.

"Yes. I do mind. I wish to speak with you, Eunice"—she flushed angrily at the use of her Christian name—"I will wait, unless I am removed by force."

"Kindly go, Mr. Sheldon," said Eunice. "Mr. Storm evidently dislikes having his statements overheard."

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Sheldon stood up, and was bowing himself out, but Eunice stretched forth her hand and Sheldon shook it, very red in the face the while. He went out, and before Storm could speak, Eunice turned on him with a break in her voice:

“Mr. Storm, I am not engaged to you. You should not have told Mr. Jessop that I am engaged to you! It was a peculiarly unworthy lie!”

Storm strode nearer. His heavy face was dark with annoyance.

“What do you care about anything I say to Jessop?” he said harshly. “Why *should* you care what I chose to tell this utter stranger for my own objects? You cannot be fond of him!”

She looked steadily and long into his eyes, and the quiet audacity which had steered her across the Black Scar steel leaped in her heart.

“I *am*,” she said softly.

“Ah-h-h!” he growled, with a long drawl of venom. “You say you are fond of him! . . . Never mind, you’ll soon get over that. And, meantime,—I shall send him to the devil.”

“Oh, I don’t think you can hurt him,” she said, ready to defend Jessop, yet utterly unable to account for her readiness.

Storm sat down near her. He was intensely angry, but tried to choose his words.

“Not able to hurt him?” he repeated. “I can have him hanged quite easily. And so you take his

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part, do you? A perfect stranger, suddenly sprung from nowhere, whom you have seen twice, perhaps—and you despise me, whom you have known all your life—Where does such madness come from? Why is such a thing possible? The hearts of women—why, they ought to be ground into powder and abolished out of the creation—their wayward, obscure, and fantastic hearts! I suppose you can almost humbug yourself into the belief that you love him—I *had* the suspicion—but what can you see in him? A mongrel like him, half-American, half-Irish, a curly-haired pet—a sketching, wandering feather-brain that flushes like a girl—and you like him in your heart, do you? He is sweeter to your female fancy than a man like me—Great God! isn't this enough to set a man crazy with——”

She deemed him nearly a lunatic, and, for an instant, relented in her hatred of him.

“Mr. Storm, pray——” she began.

“Silence! Let me talk!—that's all you've left me! ‘I *am*,’ say you? What did I say? I said: ‘You cannot be fond of him!’ and you said ‘I *am*.’ So that's how it goes? ‘I *am*!’ And where do I come in? I who have loved the sight of you since you were twelve, and watched you grow as a cat watches a mouse-hole in which she hears a stirring, and waited for you, counting the days? ‘I *am*!’ Don't make me mad, Eunice! Oh, gall and wormwood can be sweet compared to the acrid drop that can distill from a girl's lips! ‘I *am*,’ say you?”

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Didn't you think that it would hurt? Have you no pity——?”

“None,” said Eunice with lifted eyebrows, looking now with cruel coolness at him; and she added with a chilly laugh: “It is hardly *my* fault that you should want me, for I loathe you.”

“Do you?” said Storm, lowering his voice to a hiss. “But you will marry me and no one else. As for your artist-fellow, your curly-headed buck, do you know how I shall deal with *him*? I go straight from here now to tell the police that David Storm pointed him out as his would-be murderer. You saw him, and so did Jackson and his mother. . . . Ah, that touches you, does it?”

Eunice's utter astonishment that anyone but herself, Sheldon, Mrs. Jackson, and the chauffeur knew the secret they shared in common instantly overwhelmed and tamed her. In her pity for Jessop was mingled a thought of remorse for the unlucky policeman, who, she felt, would be ruined by the revelation.

“Do you think now I can hurt him?” chuckled Storm vindictively.

But Eunice had more courage than many men. Hate surged up now through her terror, and scarce knowing what she said, she struck hard and deep.

“How did you know?” she cried. “Were you *there to see*?”

Had she not been so excited she must have seen that Storm flinched before her for a second. But

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the sight of her profound agitation comforted him, and he forced a torrent of words with which to terrorize her.

"I wasn't exactly there to see, but I was there to hear you pleading with Sheldon—nice police officer *he* must be!—not to tell something or other to Inspector Hunter against your ready-tongued admirer; and I very quickly found out what the something was. Oh, I generally get what I want—some few men are like that—they arrive somehow. In this case, there is no secret about it—I wrung it out of Mrs. Jackson: I paid for it, and got it."

Eunice's lips curved with disdain, which was helpful, for even in this the coarse grain and meanness of the man appeared. He didn't scruple to betray his confidante without any need—though she could not guess how unfairly he dealt with poor old Mrs. Jackson—and her contempt revived her spirit sufficiently to bring a shrug to her shoulder, and a challenge to her lips.

"Tell anything or anyone you like," she said steadily. "Still you will be impotent to hurt. Sheldon has just assured me that the innocent man you hate is safe, unless some motive for such a crime can be surmised by the authorities."

"Ah," said Storm—and putting out his forefinger he solemnly tapped her shoulder, heedless of her shrinking. "I happen to be able to supply the motive, too! You have had the bad luck to fall in love with a convict"—and he said it with so much

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emphasis that it did not enter her mind to doubt his words.

Her heart had sunk, and her stare of alarm at his face was a confession of his conquest. She half-turned, as if to fly from him; and then faced him again. And now, driven into a corner, the last weapon of woman—guile—was active in her. In those moments of silence she resolved to go herself to Douglas Jessop—to warn him of impending doom as well as to learn “the hiding-place of the will.” Storm little guessed that he was forcing her into his rival’s arms.

Having set out to deceive, she did it well. Looking down at her clenched hands, pale indeed, but smiling demurely, she made her appeal.

“No, don’t be too bitter against him. I like him—you must wish me to be frank—I like him somewhat—I cannot think him guilty of so great a crime, though things look black at present. Don’t press him too hardly, and tell me how many days—you give me—to think—to decide.”

Bending near, scarce crediting his ears, he heard the low words through her labored breathing.

“Days to decide?” said he, amazed at her yielding, yet willing to be flattered. “Couldn’t you decide now? Don’t you like me, too?”

“Oh, yes, I have liked you—I told you so,” she murmured; “but still, one must have time—one must think a little—four days!”

“Well, if you insist——”

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He caught her hand, and she suffered him to draw her close, but she kept her eyes down, lest he should see their fire.

"But you must leave me now, please. I am overwrought."

"You won't think me a beast? You won't think me too harsh? I simply had to win you."

"No, no. But leave me now, will you? pray!"

He released her. And her heart lifted in the prayer: "Now, Jackson, come quickly!"

But, in fact, Jackson came a minute too soon, for, as Storm was walking away from the cottage, he saw Jackson drive up to it in a dog-cart, and wondered, and, at the first chance, hid in a leafy garden that commanded a view of the road.

Jackson had come by appointment to be the "messenger" to Jessop, but now many things urged Eunice to go herself to Hunt Hill Farm—the bias of Inspector Hunter against Jessop; Storm's knowledge of her uncle's gesture, which all the world would interpret differently to herself; Storm's alleged knowledge of "a motive;" the danger that, with all this in the air, anyone but herself should share in the secret in Jessop's note, the secret that he was aware of the hiding-place of the will; all these things urged her to go herself.

Once she came face to face with Jessop she would soon wring the truth from him. If he convinced her she would bid him go away, else explain the many mysteries that surrounded his movements. And

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since Sheldon had just told her of Storm's lie to Jessop that she was Storm's fiancée, this suggested to her a possible explanation of Jessop's flight from her, and of his wish that she should send a "messenger." One minute, however, in his presence, and the lie would be exposed, and his desire to shun her presence would be overcome. She sent out word to Jackson to await her; had soon dressed; and the vehicle started, leaving Jock to yelp himself hoarse because he was not taken.

But Storm from his hiding-place watched them drive off, and, by fiercely sustained effort—both their backs being turned toward him—he contrived to see the road which they took after leaving the highway on top of the cliff.

"She must be going to Hillingdon—to *him*," he thought, with the wound of a red-hot dagger in his heart; and never in his life had he run faster than he pelted down into Eskmouth.

He had soon hired a trap there, and started at galloping rate to follow up the steep track to the moors. Twelve miles away lay high-set Hillingdon—and the shades of evening were then beginning to fall.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE DARK

THE summer evening could almost be called night, clouds had crowded into the sky, at times heavy raindrops spattered down like pellets, and mutterings of thunder restively rumbled over the wolds, when Eunice and Jackson arrived at Hunt Hill Farm.

It was a roomy, old-fashioned stone house, situated nine hundred feet above sea-level among hills capped by moorland and cut into deeply by tree-choked valleys. Mr. Douglas Jessop was not in, the widow who owned the place told Eunice, and when she had hospitably given the travelers some milk, and put their trap under shelter, Jackson made himself at home in the kitchen, and Eunice sat waiting in a front room.

The dusk deepened every minute. The look of the weather grew even gloomier; presently, when the hostess came in with a smiling face, Eunice, who was in a state of impatient agitation, asked her again if Mr. Jessop was likely to be long.

"I couldn't say," the other answered in the non-committal Yorkshire fashion. "He is generally out at this hour, and once or twice hasn't returned till late."

The House of Silence

“Perhaps you know where he goes?”

“Mostly across the sheep pasture and by way of Rindscarp Gill into the wood on yon side,” and she pointed up a narrow ravine that gashed the hills.

“Would I be likely to come upon him, if I were to go and look?”

“Happen you might meet him, miss,” was the cautious reply, “but the weather is rather ugly: take care you don’t get lost.”

“I’ll try!”—Eunice sprang up.

Her hostess described the way to Rindscarp Gill, the position of two bridges across it, the part of the wood where Jessop was likely to be rambling; and Eunice sallied out. A very rugged path through a plantation of firs led her into a wood of bigger growths, where even at midday it was dusk, and now it was almost impossible to see. At one place she got so entangled in undergrowth that it took her some time to extricate herself. Being bred to this wild land she went on fearlessly, but with her sense of direction rather bewildered. Now, too, it began to rain steadily, and even beyond these forest-depths the last light of day was dying out.

However, she found by the side of the path a rough cattle shelter, which was one of the landmarks mentioned to her; and now, when a sound of waters grew in her ears, she knew that she was going right. Passing from the hut down the path between serried tree-trunks, she came to a cutting, about twenty feet

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high, and not more than three feet apart at the top, through which the track, now on solid rock, led steeply down to the edge of Rindscarp Gill—a true ravine or canyon, very narrow, but profoundly deep, all steep rock and bush—from the bottom of which boomed up a music of tumbling waters where the swollen beck foamed seawards.

She had begun to walk down the cutting when she heard a sound of feet on boards in front and far beneath—coming towards her. For at the bottom of the path on which she stood was a flat ledge of rock at the edge of the Gill, and on this rested two planks fastened together, to form a makeshift bridge to span the little river. The distance between the two sides of the valley was not more than eight feet at that spot; and probably not once in a week did anyone cross the plank bridge.

But someone's feet were now on it; and Eunice, before she saw the person, heard his boots through the booming of the waters thirty feet below; suddenly her heart thumped at the thought: "Here he comes!"

And now, for the first time, the question as to how this mysterious being, this artist who had already shunned her, would take her presence in that lonely place made her nervous. The sound of his steps coming, he himself being still invisible, touched her with apprehension and a sort of awe. She wished that he had not come so precipitately and so soon—that she could have a minute's respite to think; and

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just then a peal of thunder close upon her head turned her in flight.

Impulsively she hurried back through the cleft and up the path to the hut, thinking in herself that she would wait there, and, as Jessop passed, would step out to him, rapidly giving him her warnings, hear where David Storm's will was hidden, and leave him. So she entered the cow-shed, where two old spades, a heavy cudgel, and a workman's "frail" lay, and tried to compose herself to a business-like and maidenly dignity of expression with deft touches at hat and hair.

Almost at once she could hear anew someone approaching—or could divine with her ears rather than hear, for the path was coated with thick moss, and the rain, now pouring, pattered loudly on the foliage.

Then, peeping out—herself invisible to a passer in that place of darkness—she saw a man coming, and tried to quiet the quick beating of her heart. Now the form was near her, and her foot was lifted to step out. But she paused. This was not Douglas Jessop, but one of heavier build, and there was just sufficient light for her, peering keenly out, to recognize Robert Storm.

He went on rapidly, without a glance at the shed, almost running from the rain.

Storm, who had tracked her with great skill and care from Eskmouth, had left his own dog-cart at a homestead on the other side of the valley, a little lower down than the farm, and learning there where

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the artist lived, was now making his way to Hunt Hill—with no good meaning in his heart.

Eunice stood appalled at his presence, shrinking back to the farthest corner of the hut, even when he was surely gone, and in her mind was not shrinking alone, but bitter enmity against the man who had made himself her tyrant. But as she cowered there, half afraid to move, a new sound of footsteps came from the direction of the Gill, and she murmured to herself: "*This is he!—at last!*"

In some moments her eyes made out Douglas Jessop—hurrying home out of the storm. He was opposite the hut when he saw someone dash out.

At once tumultuous words leapt from Eunice's lips.

"Mr. Jessop—I am sorry to trouble you—but I am here to——"

She got no further. After one amazed glance at her, Jessop suddenly whirled round, and was gone—flying down the path up which he had come.

She ran after him—haltingly, but persistently, indignant yet determined—stopped more than once, yet went on again, saying to herself, "He does not know—he cannot—it is for his own good."

Only once he turned his head, saw that she was hurrying after him, waved her away from him with emphatic arm, and ran faster.

"I might be a leper," she thought bitterly, but never wholly abandoning the chase. "I might be

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"I might be a leper," she thought bitterly, but never wholly abandoning the chase. "I might be

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carrying the plague. Oh, I shall never forgive him—never!”

Still, the pity and astonishment in her heart kept her in motion after him, for she felt that, if he would but give her time to say one sentence, then he would not avoid her in this incredible way. Moreover, she was annoyed at herself for her bungling in addressing him, for the agitated folly which had made her waste time in saying, “I am sorry to trouble you——” as if that had mattered! And now she meant to repair that folly, to plunge straight to the point, and by her first sentence to rivet him to the spot.

He ran down the path into the cleft and through it, and she still followed, but no longer running when he totally disappeared from her, for her pursuit arose from an impulse at the spur of the moment. The impulse was now weakening, and the sense that it was scarcely very maidenly to be pursuing him in this way, even for his own salvation, was fast taking its place.

Nevertheless, she walked on rapidly into the cutting, where it was now very dark; and suddenly, when she was only a few feet away from the bridge, she heard his voice calling out to her: “Take care! I have removed the planks!”

When she reached the ledge on which the boards had rested, she saw that they were no longer there, and the beck roared noisily at the bottom of an impassable chasm. But of Jessop she saw no sign—

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he had vanished in the wood, which, on the other side, grew right down to the lip of the rock-strewn channel. She almost laughed in her anger.

"Surely," she said aloud, "he might have spoken even to a plague-stricken person across the breadth of a ravine!"—and thinking that he might still be near among the trees, she cried vehemently:

"Mr. Jessop! It is only for your own good! . . ."

There was no answer.

Then she cried again:

"Mr. Jessop! What have I done to you? Why are you behaving like a madman?"

There was no answer; and she turned, retraced her steps a few yards up the path, leant her back on one of the walls of the cutting, and stood there some time, bitterly disappointed at the result of her trip, frustrated, perplexed without end, and hardly conscious that she was wet to the skin. At last she dashed hot tears of disappointment from her eyes, and took her way back to the farm.

But she had hardly yet again reached the hut when someone in a violent hurry almost butted upon her out of the dark, and Jackson's voice cried:

"Is that you, Miss Eunice? Oh, thank goodness, I've met you—it's so dark in here, one can hardly see one's hand, and I'm sure you'll be ill, miss, out on a night like this. Here's an umbrella and a mackintosh. I borrowed them from the lady at the farm——"

"I am wet through already," answered Eunice

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with a wan smile. "Jackson, have you seen Mr. Robert Storm?"

"Yes, miss. He turned up at the farm a while since—the Lord only knows where he's sprung from. Anyhow, hearing that you were out in the storm, he started off out with another umbrella, and must be hunting about for you somewhere."

"He is, and he has found her," said another voice out of the darkness—a most grim and sullen voice. Storm walked up. Eunice and Jackson were so startled that they stood silent.

"Eunice, come with me out of the rain into a hut that's close at hand," said Storm. "You, Jackson, can go back to the farm."

His words had in them a singular authority and command, the depth and impetus of his passion making of the man that night an emperor—a master of men.

Eunice, however, declined boldly. "Into the hut?" she cried. "Not I. I do not wish to."

"You must," he said.

"Oh, come, Mr. Storm, this lady is not to be spoken to in that——" Jackson began to say, but he never finished the sentence, for a heavy blow in the face sent him staggering.

It was now difficult to see anything whatever, but Eunice heard the blow, and the scramble of feet; and in a cry febrile with agitation, like one trembling on the point of tears, she screamed out:

"Jackson, go!"

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"Not me, miss. No man does that to me——"

"Jackson! to please me!" implored Eunice.

Jackson said no more, but, grumbling something, turned and went. He knew he was physically not a match for Storm, so he meant to return with a club or a poker. The others heard his departing feet pass away; and Eunice said quietly:

"Now, Mr. Storm, I am again your slave."

"That sort of bravado is of no avail. Come into this shed out of the wet."

She entered; he followed; and her blanched face, though she could not see him, looked up to his. She half expected, though she felt no fear, that he meant to kill her.

"What are you doing here, Eunice?" he asked, an awful calm in his voice.

"Since you ask, I am here to see Mr. Douglas Jessop on a matter of business."

"Business!" he sneered, "business! A pretty business that brings you to a place like this on such a night. Do you want to drive me mad, Eunice?"

She was mechanically aware that the rain was pouring plenteously through the gaping roof upon her loosened hair, and moved a step backward to avoid it; and then it fell on the uneven floor, in heavy drops that splashed into little pools.

"I have told you the truth," she said calmly. "It was on business. There is no need for any madness on your part or mine!"

"But is this our contract? Is it fair? Hardly

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three hours ago I told you that the man was in the hollow of my hand to crush as I chose, and you then said that you liked him—I didn't mind that—that you liked him, and that I mustn't crush him, for you liked me, too, you said, and I must give you four days to think. I agreed—the bargain was struck. But the instant my back was turned you were off to come to him. Was that a woman's guile? Is there some vile rope between this whipper-snapper and you that drags you to seek him? What *can* you see in the man? You *said*, mind that you were fond of him!—you confessed it. I said 'You are not fond of him!' and you said 'I *am*!' Oh, that was bitter to me. Why, that's enough to turn an angel in heaven into a flaming devil, just those two words on a girl's tongue, 'I am'—so irrevocable, so unforgettable, so horribly cruel. Oh, shame on you to plunge in flames of anguish one who craves for you, who loves you—who loves you, I say—who asks from you only one drop of water to cool his tongue of desire. Now I will not be put off any longer, and you must do my will, girl, you must do my will."

"Oh, you are raving—let me pass," cried Eunice, with the hate in her heart expressed in her whitened lips.

"Not till you promise to obey me," retorted Storm sharply.

"And your will is?"

"That before we leave this hut you promise to marry me. You must; you must vow. It is a

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humiliating thing, too, for me to have to force you to be my lawful wife because of your infatuation—your wild passion—for this Mr. Nobody of Nowhere, but if I can secure you in no other way, I will in that. I am one that's never balked—I always get in the end what I want—it's my creed—it's my habit; and without you I simply couldn't and wouldn't live. So I must stoop to this—and I tell you that unless you say 'yes' here and now, I go straight from here and have him arrested this night. He can't run away before morning; if he tries, he must fail: and there's no doubt about his guilt—the old mole pointed at him as the man, and I am in a position to supply a perfect motive for the act. Say 'yes' to me now, and I make you a good husband; say 'no,' and *he* is cleared out of my way, and I'll see to it that you say 'yes' later."

For a moment no sound fell on their strained ears but the spasmodic splashing of heavy drops on the floor and the gusts of rain without. Then Eunice seemed to wilt and cower in the darkness.

"I say 'yes,'" she said quietly; and Storm could detect the tremble of horror in her voice. Yet this strange wooer was satisfied.

"Good—you say yes," he gurgled.

"But think what that 'yes' means!" she cried wildly, unable to resist the welling tide of her hatred, which urged her at any cost to lacerate him to death with fresh javelins of jealousy—"think what it means! How I must love him! when I, who loathe

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you, consent to marry you just to save him from suffering. Just think—what a reckless and head-long passion for a woman to confess! What a profligate idolatry for this Nobody, this ‘utter stranger’ to me, whom the world thinks guilty of theft and murder! Did you ever know such a love? such a fierce, sweet love? And are you mean enough to hold in your arms a girl who so wildly loves another? who, when she has to endure your kisses, will shut her eyes tight, and fancy that your lips are his? Shall I stick to my ‘yes’? Do you still wish it?”

Eunice knew that he must be writhing with anguish, but he hissed through teeth that ground together:

“Yes, *I’ll* tame you!—*I’ll* stop that tongue! Yes, I still wish it, you spit-fire!”

“Then, I say yes.”

“You swear?”

“Before God. And you, on your part, renounce all intention of ever breathing a word of your suspicions against Mr. Douglas Jessop—is it agreed?”

“Yes. It is agreed.”

“It is *not* agreed,” said a voice quite startlingly close from the door of the shed.

Jessop stood there, his form scarce discernible.

He had come without any secrecy, but the man and woman were far too preoccupied with each other to hear his tread on the soft carpet of grass and mud, and he had been listening there in the dark quite two minutes before he spoke.

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He had now come from Hunt Hill Farm through the fir plantation, for, on running from Eunice across the ravine, and on drawing away the planks, he had passed down the wood on the other side, recrossed the Gill by a more substantial bridge lower down, and so had hastened homeward to the farm, not knowing that Eunice's dog-cart was there. But, as he had opened the gate to go in, up had run Jackson, still flushed with indignation from Storm's blow. Some word had been spoken as the two met, and Jackson had recognized Jessop's voice, though in the rain and darkness his face was invisible.

"You, Mr. Jessop?" yelled the excited chauffeur. "Look here, sir—I appeal to you as a gentleman—Miss Lowther is being bullied by that beast Storm——"

"Bullied! Where?" Jessop gasped.

"Up there in the Gill near by a shed where there's a——" He stopped, hearing Jessop rushing off into the night. Ten minutes later Jessop was saying at the door of the hut:

"It is *not* agreed!"

"Mr. Jessop!" screamed Eunice in a panic of joy and alarm; and the wild question that sprang up in her heart was, "*Did he hear* what I said about a 'fierce, sweet love'?"

"Damn you, what do *you* want here?" roared Storm, striding up to the motionless figure.

Jessop made no answer to Storm.

"I invite you, Miss Lowther, to accompany me

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some little way along the path to Hunt Hill Farm," he said.

"Oh, you do?" bellowed Storm. "You invite her—— Get you gone!" he added with a new note of savagery. "Be off, before I wring your neck!"

Again came through the gloom the clear, distinctly-enunciated words:

"Kindly oblige me, Miss Lowther, by coming with me."

"It is a fruitless invitation!" sneered Storm, thinking to do more harm by speech than by physical violence. "Do you happen to be aware, or not, that this lady is my promised wife?"

"That is a lie, Miss Lowther, is it not?" demanded Jessop icily.

"No, it is true," whispered Eunice, for the admission nearly choked her, "though it would not have been true if uttered two minutes ago; it would have been horribly untrue if I had had the good fortune to speak to you earlier in the evening."

Jessop apparently ignored the sorrowful qualification.

"It is a compact just made, then," he said. "In fact, I heard it made; and it is not a binding compact, since it is based on services which Miss Lowther is so gracious as to wish to do to me, and, unhappily, I am not in a position to be able to accept any services at the hands of Miss Lowther."

"Oh, get away, you fool——" raged Storm,

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though his mother-wit kept him from laying hands on Jessop, since there was something he wanted to know, and it might be blurted out in the stress of passion.

"This being so," continued Jessop, with never a sign that he was conscious of Storm's presence, "since I cannot recognize Miss Lowther as anyone's promised wife under such conditions, I again ask her to come with me——"

"I will come," sobbed Eunice brokenly.

"What!" growled Storm: "you won't!"

"I will."

"Is this your vow just sworn?" he shouted in her face.

"I never break a promise once made," she said. "My promise remains, I'm afraid. But that will not hinder me from going to the farm with this gentleman."

"Not if I know it, Eunice!"

Just then a gleam of lightning, like some awful eyelid that opens, flutters, and shuts, showed them to one another, revealing Storm with his left hand grasping the girl's shoulder and his right hand clenched. Then, in the tremendous darkness that followed, he received the surprise of his life, for Jessop struck him so hard and true that he dropped like a log.

He did not recover for a full minute. When he regained his feet he did not rush after them instantly, but stood there in a dangerous and criminal mood of

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silence. He had just wrung from Eunice her consent to marry him, and now she was off into the night with the wizard who, without effort, had bewitched her, to possess whose spells and magic Storm would gladly have spent ten years of toil. He groped about the hut for one of the spades in it, which he had happened to touch before, and, in groping, his hand touched the bludgeon, a heavy stake, which lay there. This he grasped, and with it went out softly, the devil now in him.

Nor was there the least danger that they should hear his coming, those two hearts so throbbing with agitation. Side by side they went together a good way toward the farm, and not a word was said, until at last Eunice found the silence unbearable—she must either speak or shriek aloud.

“Mr. Jessop,” she began timidly, “you have chosen to shun me in such a way——”

“I am sorry,” he broke in instantly, “but I am not in a position to discuss matters—if you speak I must leave you——”

“But—what is it? I came, Mr. Jessop——”

“We must part, then,” he said, and his voice was drawn and harsh. “That is your way to the farm. I cannot go to it, since you are there. But you have a groom—send him to me at an old mill by the path through the wood on the other side of the Gill—there is a bridge lower down. If you have any message send it: I will wait by the mill, and will tell him the whereabouts of the will.”

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He said these strange words gallopingly, with an effort to be cold and precise, and yet have done with them, and before her surprise could utter even a cry, he was again gone, pelting from her as before, down a shooting alley which just there crossed the foot-path they were on. At the same instant she heard a twig crack sharply behind her, and she started at the fresh memory of Storm, at the consciousness that he was there, though she could see nothing—that he must be demoniac with rage, and, by an impulse, without definite motive, she hurried after Jessop—though really meaning to avoid Storm—and a low sound of sobbing escaped her, for she was wholly unnerved.

And Storm also started running down the same alley, hearing something of the others, and thinking that they were running together from his vengeance. As he ran a hellish gayety lit his eyes, for he nearly caught up with them on the path, and was just in time to hear Jessop say: "I will wait by the mill and will tell the whereabouts of the will." Then the twig snapped under his feet, and, as it seemed to him, they had started into flight from him.

As he ran fast, and Eunice slowly, he was soon close upon her. Hearing him near, she darted in among the trees, and heard him crashing past. Utterly spent and exhausted, she leant against a tree-bolt panting for breath. There she remained fully five minutes, staring with terror at the thought of the meeting of the two men, conscious that blood might taint the black air that night, but para-

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lyzed and impotent, able only to lean and breathe heavily.

At last she moved, feeling that she must be doing something; and as she stood out into the middle of the alley again, she heard someone coming back. It was Storm, who in his fury had blundered, lost the artist, lost all sense of direction, and was now running wild at random, seeking the happy lovers, but not knowing where he was, or whither he ran.

She just had time to avoid him. In rushing past her he almost brushed her dress. But he did not conceive that she was anywhere hereabouts, nor would he have cared greatly had he met her then, for his all-devouring thought was to feel that stout cudgel crushing Jessop into a pulp.

Eunice read his mind, and forgot her own distress in the new terror of a crime for which she would ever hold herself responsible. Bracing her flagging energies, she followed Storm as best she could, saw him reach the path again, turn down it past the shed, and tear blindly on towards the ravine and the upper bridge—the bridge from which Jessop had removed the planks!

CHAPTER VIII

JESSOP'S PROMISE

EUNICE followed as one in a trance, and blindly, darkly Robert Storm preceded her, going to his death.

At first she realized not at all what she did, her mind was so dazed, her spirit in such a whirl. He had come upon her again in the dark like a tornado, and it was but feebly, and by definite stages, so to speak, that a new dread was born in her.

She knew exactly where the bridge across the ravine was—or where it had been, till Jessop removed it in his flight from her half-an-hour before—and in some secret nook of her consciousness there was the knowledge that when Storm reached the narrow cleft through the rock he would recognize his bearings, for she had seen him, or heard him, cross the bridge and come up that way a little while before. So he would know the spot, and, knowing it, would rush on confidently till he fell headlong down, to be crushed into a shapeless mass where the torrent's triumphant roaring would stifle his death-cry.

It was then that the dread question arose clearly and not to be defied: "What am I doing? I at least

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know the danger. If he dies, I shall have killed him!"

And still her feet did not stop, nor did she scream a warning. She followed with swift stealth, fatigue being now a vain thing in the face of a tragedy.

She heard him swear loudly to himself when, for a moment, he blundered off the path. He had some weapon or other in his hand with which she heard him viciously hit at a bush or a tree-trunk, and she guessed from the sound that it was a heavy stick. She could not imagine where he had obtained it, since, to the best of her belief, he carried no stick when they met in the shed.

And, about that time, she began to understand the real purpose of his determined plunging onward through the dark wood. Douglas Jessop was on the other side of the ravine—waiting for Jackson by the old mill, and Storm, who had stolen up so close, must have heard at least part of Jessop's message, and knew of the rendezvous fixed on the spur of the moment.

He had passed up the ravine and through the wood on that further side earlier in the evening, had then probably seen the mill, knew exactly where it was, and now wished to go to it, with some heavy weapon in his hand—as she could tell by the sound of the angry blows he made at any and every obstruction. But if somebody was to be killed, was it not righteous that it should be the would-be killer? Yet even in thinking so, her heart within her prayed: "Oh, hand

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of God, restrain me this night!" And still she followed.

She had just promised to marry him on condition of his silence as to Jessop, and she had been brought up from her earliest youth in a house in which a promise was a holy thing. She knew herself well enough to be sure that, if he kept his part of the compact, then no power on earth would change her from keeping hers. Had she not said, "before God"? And now her lips were dumb!

They both soon turned into the moss-grown path by the side of which stood the cow-byre, which they passed closely without seeing it.

And still some element of Spartan endurance lifted Eunice's feet and put them down regularly, as if she had been turned into a clock-work object. Even while she inwardly moaned to be set free from the power of the spell that was on her, the enmity in her heart stormed and clamored and drowned her prayer, as her chattering teeth hissed at Storm softly, with a passionate protest: "You beast! you are naught else. Why should you not die?"

So she followed, her face haggard and gray, her eyes glaring, like a pair of flames, her hair hanging bedraggled down her drenched back, and above her, like a mutter of menace, the thunder amidst the hills, and the pitiless scouring of rain over the moors.

Now the sound of the waters tumbling down at the bottom of the ravine began to grumble in her

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ears, and she was arguing fiercely with her conscience.

“Whose fault is it? He came unasked. I did not go to him. He came to do harm. It is his own evil purpose that leads him away from the other bridge, near to where the mill is, to *this* bridge—if it is still there. It was certainly removed, but it *may* have been replaced; and as he is in a hurry to do wrong—why should I restrain him?”

Suddenly, exactly as she had expected, Storm, as the soft path ended, and the rock began, and the noise of the water became definite, quickened his pace and ceased that vengeful whacking at the undergrowth.

She, too, broke into a half run, all a-quiver—to see—to hear! When his steps clattered on the floor of rock in the cutting the strain grew unendurable, and she tried to cry after him. But no sound came out of her throat, and now a horrid terror seized her—suppose she was too late? Suppose her throat was too dry to cry? Wildly now she raced through the cleft, stifling, struggling with the nightmare in her brain, but finally contriving to send out into the blustering night a half-crazy shriek that stopped Storm as though he had been shot.

At that moment he was not ten feet from the ledge. He stood still for a few seconds as if to gather some sure hint of direction. Then he ran back, calling out: “Who is there?”

She did not answer—now that she was sure he had

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heard her. She turned to stagger away, trembling from head to foot in a fever of reaction. Her silence, and something of her natural voice in her cry, made him think of Eunice. If she was so near he must find her, for his vengeance on Jessop could wait, so he hurried up the path again.

As soon as she became aware that he was gaining fast upon her, she hid again a little beyond the hut, and let him pass.

Summoning all her resolution, she took up the chase, for she must see what he meant next to do. At the point where the shooting-alley crossed the path Storm kept on straight, perhaps not heeding the route Jessop had taken, perhaps making purposely to the farm for some object.

Eunice had the thought that he might be going to make sure of her whereabouts, or find out the exact locality of the mill, before starting for it, so, feeling stronger now after the removal of that self-imposed load on her conscience, she hastened over the soft wet grass of the alley, reasoning that, since Jessop had gone that way, meaning to wait at the mill, she must ultimately strike the second path that led to the lower bridge. Indeed, it was probable that Jessop had taken the nearest way; and it seemed to her troubled mind that now, above all else, Jessop must be warned of the enraged tornado that was coming, armed, upon him.

To her sharp vision, now quite used to the darkness, the night was no longer utterly rayless, so by

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a sort of instinct, or second sight, she saw the mouth of the path when she came to it, and turned into it without hesitation.

But this path had itself an off-shoot, into which she blundered, as Storm before her had done—a fact to which Jessop's escape was due when Storm pursued him. It quickly lost itself in a mass of brambles and thorns, but Eunice wasted some minutes of bitter doubt and impatience there. At last, returning on her tracks, she managed by dint of peering to see why she had gone astray, hit on the right path, and presently found herself crossing a narrow but permanent bridge that had railings to it, with the solemn voice of the torrent singing a nocturne beneath her feet.

She knew that the bridge was not far from the edge of the wood through which she had just passed, and as she had seen the roof of the mill while driving in the afternoon to the farm, she could make a good guess as to the locality. She quickened her pace, presently chose by instinct between two new paths, and soon was conscious of something big, and blacker than the blackness, immediately before her.

She ran upon gravel in a clearing of the wood, struck her foot against a low wall surrounding the gloomy building, which stood there, a dim and shapeless thing, like some fabled monster of the ages when the earth was without form and void; then she stopped, voiceless some seconds, before she dared

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utter a sound, for the mill was like a great ghost to her, and all those benighted and brooding trees were ghost-haunted. Soon, however, she ventured to send out a shrill cry into the uproar caused by the wind and rain in the foliage, and the spasmodic growling of the storm-god in the heavens.

“Is Mr. Jessop there?”

She thought that somewhere she heard a sound as of smothered astonishment, but there was no answer. She climbed the wall, and bravely stood close to the dark building.

“Mr. Jessop, I suppose you are here,” she said. “It is disconcerting—very trying and bitter”—her voice broke in her throat—“that you should shun one who has come through some peril and suffering with the single idea of serving you. You know your own mysterious reasons; I—cannot divine them. But I am here now to warn you——” Her voice yielded again, but she conquered it, and went on: “Forgive me, if you are hearing me, that I cannot speak clearly—my throat is parched, and I am nigh dropping with fatigue and grief—but I am here to warn you that a madman wholly irresponsible for his actions to-night is probably at this moment searching for you with some kind of weapon. He knows where you are, I believe—so you had better—— Oh, well, I have done what I could.”

Her words sank to a weary murmur. Perforce she stopped.

There was no answer.

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"Heaven only knows whether or not he has heard me," she sobbed, and broke into tears.

She stood there a couple of minutes more, catching her breath in a sort of hysteria, and in the midst of her sobbing Jessop's voice came from the blackness of the mill.

"Go to the farm, Miss Lowther!" he said, with a quiet gravity that was not the least amazing feature of a night's folly.

"You heard what I said?" she managed to ask, addressing the sheer darkness.

"I heard. You mean well, and I will do what I can. Go back to the farm!"

"I am going. But will you tell me now what you promised in your note as to my uncle's will?"

"I asked you to send me your groom, your chauffeur. You have not obeyed me. Your uncle has probably left a dozen wills in your favor in his house. I will see to it. Go to the farm."

"I am going! But, Mr. Jessop, can you not——?"

"If you speak again, you will receive no answer."

"Then, I won't speak again. Only—will you go away from here now just to save me some distress of mind?"

No answer.

"For my sake—will you?"

"Yes."

"Then—good-night—good-bye!"

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No answer.

Her hand drooped languidly, and she smiled through her tears, for at last she had conquered him. She turned to go, and instantly caught sight of a carriage lamp swaying unsteadily up the path by which she had come from the bridge. The lamp was held in someone's hand, and she knew that it must be Storm—tireless and implacable.

She pitched her voice high again to cry:

“Here he comes now—remember your promise!” and her heart began to beat as loud and fierce as if Storm were a goblin of the night.

In a few seconds he was beside her, panting with his furious haste. He streamed the beam of light over her face an instant, and, without saying one syllable to her, was off again with grim purpose, peering and ferreting here and there with the lamp, and swearing the while, like a dog that has mislaid his quarry, and whimpers his desire to kill. Eunice, on the brink of real hysteria now, stood like a statue of Terror on tiptoe, in an ecstasy of apprehension that Jessop's arrogance would strangle his promise to lie hid for her sake. She expected every instant the tragedy of his appearing, and at last, able to bear the strain no longer, a scream pealed from her lips:

“Do not come out! Oh, please do not fail me, Mr. Jessop!”

At which outcry, Storm's twisting and prying were spurred to fresh urgency like the spinning of a lan-

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guishing top at the lash of the whip, for the appeal proved to him that Jessop was really near. All round the mill he ran seeking, holding forth the light into the bushes, poking among a pile of old timbers, striking them with the cudgel, even gazing up into the recesses of the big wheel that leant huge against the building, scrutinizing the place so narrowly that no one could be on the outside of it and remain undiscovered.

Jessop, however, could not be found; and even Storm hesitated at facing the unknown danger of ladders and trapdoors in the interior. He came back to Eunice.

"Your fop is a wise man!" he grunted, standing before her with uplifted lamp, and getting his breath a little.

She said nothing. He saw that she was distraught and ready to sink.

"Come along to the farm," he said, grasping her arm. The desire to flinch from him gave her new life. She turned and went with him down the path, and across the bridge, the lamp lighting their steps amid grass tufts and puddles. Not a word was spoken between them, until they were climbing the opposite hill.

"A nice object you look," he said then, throwing the light on her as her steps faltered at the steep ascent. "Your hair is streaming down your back, you have mud all over you, and your face is like that of a woman of forty. And for what? Do you call

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this seemly conduct? Is it modest? Is it maidenly? Good God!"

There was an undertone of gruff chaff in his words, but her whitened lips were set vindictively, and she replied not a syllable. Presently, when the torrent's roar was passing out of their ears, he began again.

"So you were with him?—in that rotten old mill—alone with him?"

She answered nothing. A few seconds later he suddenly whispered at her ear:

"Did he kiss you?"

It was a lunatic's question, but Eunice recked little now of the danger she was running, and only saw feverishly that she could stab him. So she spoke.

"You have no right to ask," she murmured, sure that he would interpret her words wrongly.

"Which means that he *did*? Oh, he did, did he? And you are gloating over it, I suppose?"

She did not care if he struck her.

"You ask stupid questions," she pouted, with a girlish simper that was marvelous in the conditions. "I believe that such things are not usually unpleasant."

His teeth ground audibly, and she went on in silence by his side, actually reveling in her power to plague this man with the agonies of the lost.

In a few minutes they arrived at the farm, where the kindly-disposed landlady—little guessing the wild

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doings that had disturbed the wind-swept girl—was urgent that Miss Lowther should stay for the night. But as Eunice was certain that this would mean the keeping of Jessop out of his bed, she insisted upon returning to Eskmouth forthwith, and as insistently declined Storm's offer to take her in his conveyance—she would go in her own.

“But do I understand that your promise to me holds good for ever?” he asked as she climbed to her seat beside the scowling Jackson.

“Yes; so long as you keep yours to me.”

Jackson gave Storm no time for further talk. In fact, the near wheel nearly caught the latter before he could spring clear. Then he leaped into his own dog-cart, which had been brought to the farm, and followed close, until he saw Eunice enter the door of her cottage on the outskirts of Eskmouth soon after midnight. After a longing look at the far lights in the turrets of Hargen Hall—Storm's own residence—he turned the horse resolutely toward Beach House, where he had taken it into his head to pass every night since David Storm's death.

At about the same hour, Douglas Jessop, after wandering drenched over the moor, came to Hunt Hill Farm, inquired furtively at the kitchen if the visitors had gone, and, learning that they had, went to his room, leaving a yawning plowman to lock up and curse all town folk.

But there was little sleep for Jessop that night—so great a burden on his brain was the mass of his

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gratitude and the stress of his compunction. He could not doubt that Eunice had again run some risk to serve him, for out of the depths of the wood he had watched Storm running at random in the clearing round the mill with his lamp and the murderous-looking stake, while he himself was unarmed. Were it not for the promise to Eunice, neither his pride nor his inclination would have permitted him to fly or to lie hid. She had said: "For my sake, will you?" and he had allowed himself to answer "Yes"; and this had probably saved him from a serious affray. Moreover, he had unquestionably heard her confess, or rather boast, to Storm in the hut, that she loved him—with "such a love"—"a fierce, sweet love," words at which, he fancied, the very trees of the forest must have tingled in their inmost sap, and the rain become warm, as tears are.

Yet ever he had insulted her, shunned her, run from her. . . . What could she think! What could she guess! Surely, she must know that he had motives? But, at a loss to conjecture *what* motives, she must be more bruised and sore inwardly than a wound over which vitriol is poured. Still she persisted in rescuing him—with how great a valor! with what constancy! What a girl! what a woman to love! Oh, it was sore and pitiful he could never be anything to her—it was fated so.

Nevertheless, he felt the weight of the debt of his gratitude to be intolerable. He must do something,

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howsoever slight, to repay her; at least he must restore to her the possessions which she had lost through the concealment of the will. Above all else, he must free her from the ruffian, Storm. He had an idea that, being now poor, she was in a measure dependent on Storm for the mere means of existence. Hence, to make her wealthy would be to liberate her from the high hand of a scoundrel.

He did not know whether she would send him a messenger the next day to learn about the will, as he had bid her, but he resolved, if she did not send by noon, then he would act in her behalf desperately and at once.

There was need for haste perhaps, for he was not blind to the fact that the police were looking askance at him, owing to the suspicious circumstances which had marked his stay of a night in Beach House. If misfortune fell upon him in that direction, his power of action to repay his debt to Miss Lowther would be limited, perhaps fatally interfered with, for Storm evidently meant to force her into marriage.

With such thoughts running through his brain, he lay tossing in a purgatory of emotions till the light of the summer morning intruded into his room. Then he fell into a brief sleep. For himself he was not concerned, but he grieved for Eunice.

He waited till noon the next day, hoping for a messenger from her, and waited again from noon till three o'clock, and then, waiting no longer,

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started in a *gig* down the long moor road to Eskmouth.

Now, he could not drive through Eskmouth to his former hotel without being seen, and two of the many eyes that saw him were those of Police Constable Sheldon, one of whose eyes, it is known, was smaller than the other. In fact, it would appear that Sheldon used one eye for seeing and the other for reflection.

“Hello!” he said to himself, “Jessop back again in Eskmouth. What’s the meaning of that? Something is stirring for sure.”

Sheldon’s mind, day and night, was at this very time full of the young artist, and this fresh sight of him spurred him to the highest alertness. He had staked everything—at any rate, his livelihood—upon Jessop’s innocence, and each day that dawned saw more ripe the plans which he had formed for laying hands on the actual culprit. Yet the more he thought of the artist, the more he understood that there was something dark about him, something which really, and not merely in appearance, connected him with the death of David Storm. What in those very hours was most occupying Sheldon’s thoughts was Jessop’s flight from Eunice, of which she had told him. That, he said to himself, was not done without a reason. It was like the remorse of a man, still unhardened in crime, who flies from the sight of one whom he has wronged. Most certainly, Sheldon’s thoughts of Jessop would have as-

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sumed a still darker hue, if Eunice had told him of the note offering to reveal the hiding-place of the will.

Sheldon used both eyes well that day, from the moment that he was aware of Jessop's mysterious re-appearance in Eskmouth. He knew when—at about six in the evening—Jessop left the hotel, and strolled out along the cliff road, carrying a small black leather bag in his hand.

Out of the shrubbery round the ruined church on the cliff Sheldon saw Jessop lying in the hollow of the cliff, gazing through field glasses at Beach House. And Sheldon kept asking himself: "What's up? What's the next move?"

Jessop did not return to the hotel. He strolled on the beach, never going very near to Beach House, but never more than a mile distant. He lounged up the cliff again, and sat for hours on tufts of grass or boulders, the bag at his feet. He strolled up side lanes, and sat on gates.

By ten o'clock the night had darkened almost to blackness; at midnight a little drizzle began to fall; at two the artist went down the cliff to the road: and, with the steps of a specter, Sheldon shadowed him.

There was no moon, no star, not a breath of wind, just the thin drizzle and the darkness, and the sea babbling softly to itself of what it had done, and of all that it meant to do. One ray of light shone out of Beach House, as if someone kept vigil in the room where David Storm had died.

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The artist walked to Beach House causeway, jumped down to the sands, walked forward to the end of the headland, with Sheldon so close on his heels as to be able to make out that, as Jessop walked, he took out of the bag some articles that clinked like steel, and put them in his pocket.

At the seaward end of the headland, Jessop examined the rock with the air of one looking for a good place to climb it. Then Sheldon heard a little click, with the click came a ray of light, and the policeman saw that round Jessop's neck was hung an electric torch. Without any further delay or hesitation Jessop began to climb, and Sheldon, watching the manner and style of the climber for a few seconds, muttered to himself: "Great Scott! was I all wrong in my theories? He can do it!"

As it happened, Sheldon himself, in the interests of His Majesty, had entered Beach House by stealth in the small hours of the morning—but entered it through the wicket in the great gate, and the kitchen door. He had with him keys that roughly fitted both locks, and thither he raced now at top speed. Soon he was in the courtyard, and thence into the kitchen, passing up the main stairs without a sound.

On the landing he hid his bull's-eye lantern and helmet, for the smell of the one or a gleam of light falling on the other might reveal his presence. He crept into the big, glass-lined, semi-circular room on his hands and knees, just as Jessop's head and

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shoulders rose between two of the mullions of a window, his electric torch showing a rose-bud in his jacket-lapel, and an extinguished cigarette gripped between his teeth—both being singularly incongruous elements in a seemingly burglarious exploit.

Sheldon, knowing his ground, squirmed under poor old David Storm's invalid couch, which had been shoved up to the wall close behind the door, and Jessop's feet, in going out to the landing, passed within a few inches of his head. Sheldon crawled out, looked after him, and saw him apparently hesitate a little at an alcove, his eyes bent on a grandfather's clock that stood there. But he went on to the upper stairs—still looking round at the clock, however; and, on account of this, his foot happened to bump a little against the bottom step.

Before Sheldon could lift himself from the floor to follow—before Jessop was on the tenth step from the bottom—the door of David Storm's bedroom on the left of the landing opened slowly and noiselessly, whereat a little light streamed out, and the astounded policeman saw Robert Storm, in pajamas and slippers, gazing out into the gloom. The man's face was deathly pale; he was sweating with an unearthly fear, for he had heard the bump of Jessop's foot, and evidently thought he was listening to the sound of a ghost.

However, Storm was not made of soft material, and his strained vision quickly caught sight of Jes-

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sop moving up the stair, a figure dimly lit by the offshine of the electric torch. With a violent start, with new fire in his eyes, and new blood in his heart, Storm crept after Jessop. After Storm went Sheldon, bent almost on all fours.

CHAPTER IX

SHELDON'S RUSE

ON reaching the top of the stairs, Jessop, with gallant braggadocio, put a hand in his pocket, drew out matches, loudly struck one, and relighted the cigarette which he found between his lips, as though to convince himself that his nerves were not quivering in that soundless house. Storm, crouching close behind, recognized him as the match flared, and Sheldon, behind Storm, at the sudden glare of the match, and the lighting of the cigarette, thought: "Well, of all the scatter-brain things ever done! But it is fine. Gad, it is fine!"

Jessop, for his part, seemed to know the house so well, that another notion occurred to the policeman.

"Could he have made a study of the house beforehand and deliberately wrecked himself on the Black Nab, so as to get into it for his own purposes?"

On the upper floor Jessop turned with perfect decision from one corridor into another, passed down the second almost to its end without any particular effort to tread soundlessly, it would appear, and entered a room that overlooked the courtyard. He

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left the door open; after a hesitating moment, Storm crept in after him.

"Better not make a crowd," thought Sheldon, and he crouched near the door, no longer breathing, only seeing, his brain seething with a thousand wonderings.

The room was a music-room used by Eunice when a child. It was, like most others in Beach House, lofty and spacious, containing an old cracked piano, a square table, a music-stand, and some faded chairs. The ray of Jessop's torch enabled Sheldon to guess at these things by vague glints and glimmers cast here or there, as he moved through the silent shadows.

On top of the piano stood two old candelabra, fashioned to carry three candles each, though no candles were now in them. They were ormolu, of the Louis Quinze period, with painted porcelain cups and bases. Jessop streamed the light of the torch over both, saw that the porcelain of one was a little chipped, and began to take that one to pieces.

This he did by simply unscrewing its broad porcelain base, for through the whole length of the center column passed a male screw of steel, the remaining sections of porcelain and metal being kept in place by two pieces of ormolu, pierced by female screws, at top and bottom.

The loosening of the foundation loosened all the other pieces, and Jessop, his eyes flinching for a second from the ascending reek of the cigarette, gripped between his teeth, quickly had the six or

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seven different sections reposing on the cover of the piano.

Round the central screw he found wrapped lengthways a long envelope. . . .

He glanced inside—for it was not fastened down—saw that it contained paper, saw how it was addressed, and without troubling to read any of it—for he was certain as to what it contained—he laid the package on a table just behind him. Obviously he did not wish it to be discovered that the candelabrum had been dismantled, as he set to work resolutely to rebuild it.

But this was a far more delicate and difficult operation. Again the curling smoke impeded his eyes, so he took two hurried puffs and laid the offending cigarette on the table beside the long, curled envelope. Then he betook himself intently to the task of reconstructing the ornament.

The room was very dark, save for the one small space on top of the piano, where the rays of the torch were focused on Jessop's efforts, but Sheldon was sure that Storm's hand slowly rose from the floor, seized the envelope from the table, took out the paper that was in it, and replaced the empty envelope on the table. It was stiff and rust-stained from its long repose in the recess around the screw, and it was highly probable that Jessop would not examine it again just then. As a matter of fact, when he made an end of his job, he turned, put the envelope in his pocket without a glance, took up the cigarette-

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stump not yet quite extinguished, put it in his mouth, and started on his backward way. At that instant Storm was under the table, and Sheldon, as Jessop moved to go out, had hastened softly to the end of the corridor, and far beyond the scope of the tiny electric lamp fastened to Jessop's coat.

Once more the procession of three started along the two corridors backward to the main staircase, Jessop ahead, thinking himself alone, Storm next, thinking there were two, and Sheldon behind, conscious that there were three. Here indeed the last was first in knowledge. The carpet was everywhere very thick: never a sound could be heard save a dumb creak from Jessop's boots, for he moved carelessly, almost with a swagger, and all the darksome house seemed to hang in a hushed suspense, awaiting the outcome.

Sheldon was still at the top of the upper flight when Jessop reached the landing, and he could see that the artist, as he passed the room from which Storm had come out, paused a little, probably in some dismay and astonishment, for Storm had left the door a little open, and there was a light in there which showed plainly.

Jessop's pace at once quickened, and he moved with greater caution. He hurried into the big room facing the sea, and, as he disappeared, Storm, who had been moving down the stairs almost in a sitting posture, stood up and made a silent rush for his own room.

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Sheldon saw his right arm push the door a little more open, and reach inward. By the faint light that came out, Sheldon could see that Storm's hand, which, on going in, held the paper taken from the envelope, came out without the paper. Now it gripped a revolver.

On this Storm again crouched to follow Jessop into the front room, while Sheldon, breathless with excitement, and hardly knowing exactly when to interfere, reached the door of Storm's room. On a table close at hand lay the paper just as Storm had tossed it inside. Sheldon promptly seized it. He would make sure of that, at any rate.

Dreading lest, at any moment, he should hear the deafening crash of a shot, he, too, wound his way to the door of the front room. He could see Jessop putting a leg through the casement by which he had entered, could see him toss his cigarette-end away down the face of the rock, and adjust the electric ray to the center of his breast. Whereabouts Storm was he could not discover from the landing, but very soon after Jessop disappeared through the window, he made out Storm's body at the casement framed in the less dense darkness of the outer night. Sheldon's heart was now in his mouth, for he expected that Storm was about to shoot. A man with an electric torch slung over his heart would offer an excellent target as he labored down the rock. But there was so much at issue that Sheldon took the risk, and ensconced himself a second time under the invalid

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couch. Still, he lay in such an attitude as to spring out as promptly as might be if Storm fired. He waited a few breathless seconds, but no shot awoke the echoes. Storm, if ever he meant to shoot, had evidently changed his mind. He only stood there craning out, watching Jessop's descent. After a long pause Sheldon heard him shut and fasten the casement, muttering to himself, heard him come inward, pass out, and slam his door. Of course, it was not possible now to see anything. The place was dark as the grave.

Sheldon, who seemed to possess a sixth sense, suddenly caught a loud exclamation from the room in which, be it repeated, old David Storm had met his death.

"I doubt if *you'll* get much sleep to-night," Sheldon thought.

In the silence that followed he seemed to see Storm and what he was doing as clearly as if he was there—Storm staring at the table from which the paper, just tossed there by him, had vanished; and Sheldon knew that man's mind is so constituted that Storm must inevitably feel that it was a ghost who had removed the paper—*whose* ghost his brain would readily guess.

After a long pause Sheldon could hear Storm moving violently about the room like a man in a frenzy, could detect his mutterings, cries, oaths, and the shifting of furniture, and fearing that Storm, in his agony of search, might come hunting into the front room, as people in despair hunt in hopeless places,

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Sheldon got up, not wishing to be caught and shot, and stole out to get away out of the house with his prize. Herein he was well advised, for he was hardly clear of the landing when Storm came out with a lamp in his hand.

Then the policeman beheld a face so drained of blood, so wild with fright, so white with ire, as he had never seen before, while the lamp's brass and glass rattled in the man's grasp.

Into the seaward room ran Storm, and for some time Sheldon, crouching in the dark of the main entrance, heard him banging about in there, searching without sight, intense without efficacy—for even if the paper had been there, so distraught a seeker would hardly have found it. This lasted some five or six minutes, and still Sheldon stood where he was on the stair, for the sight of Storm's ghastly face caused him to change his purpose of going away at once with the paper, and had given him the idea of adopting another course.

When Storm came out it was only to hurry upstairs with the lamp, scrutinizing every step, and so back to the room above where Jessop had taken the paper out of the candelabrum; after which he returned, looking very undone like a man who has risen from a long illness, though just as he was entering his door, he flushed into a passion, vomited a horrible oath, and slammed the door upon himself with a bang which shook the whole house.

The instant he disappeared Sheldon stole up again,

Sheldon's Ruse

rescued his lamp and helmet, and entered the front room. There he took the purloined paper from his pocket, turned his bull's-eye light upon it, saw that it consisted of some sheets of thin "foreign" letter-paper, closely written on, and his eyes snapped when he saw that the script commenced with the words:

To Eunice Lowther, my dear: God bless you for a good girl. These words you will read in a locked room, alone, on the day of my death. . . .

It was the so-much-sought-for letter of the old man to Eunice!

Sheldon barely gave himself time to master its contents, skipping whole pages of retrospect, for he feared lest Storm should again come out, and so frustrate the plan which he had now formed. When he had made an end, he softly tilted up the table and set to work to unscrew with a knife-blade one of the casters, for he knew from Mr. Rooper, the lawyer, that out of the hollow of a leg of that table a parchment marked "Try elsewhere, Richard," had been drawn on the day after the old man's death; and he knew which leg.

When the caster was off, he inserted the sheets of paper into the hole, quickly screwed the caster again, and cut a minute notch in the outer wood. Then he crept out, avoiding one step that creaked, locked the kitchen door and the wicket, and went away, quite certain in his own mind that Storm would never dream of seeking the sheets in that utterly impossible

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place during the few hours that would elapse before they served their new purpose.

Bareheaded, his brain seething with bewilderment, he walked home to his lodging that morning! He reached the quiet back street with a start of surprise, for he had had no consciousness of a single step of the road, he had been so lost in perplexity.

His main reason for thinking Jessop innocent had been neither Jessop's arrogant disregard of consequences, nor the fact that Eunice Lowther had an instinctive belief in the man, but his own assumption that Jessop was not a climber—for it was certain that the criminal must be a skilled scaler of rock precipices. And now he had reason to ask himself with no little surprise why he had been such a fool as to assume any such thing. Jessop could climb as well as any man in Cumberland. Moreover, he had walked straight, without the least indecision, to the candelabrum in which David Storm's stolen letter lay concealed. Was it not clear that Jessop had placed it there? It followed, as day would follow night, that Jessop was its thief. Not yet could the policeman's unusually bright intelligence think of the possible existence of a duplicate, for his mind was focused on the letter's main purpose.

Still, certain as the presumption looked, there were points equally certain that contradicted it. How had Jessop gained access to the candelabrum on the night of the murder?—for Sheldon was adamant in the belief that David Storm was killed. Either he

Sheldon's Ruse

had run out of the house when the front door was heard to open, or he had run back to his room and was locked in there at the time when the lock of the trunk was forced. In either case, how had he got to the candelabrum? The door of the room had been watched, so he had certainly not come out of it to go up the stairs. The only supposition was that, before climbing down the rock on going out of his window, he had climbed up the sheer sidewall of the house. But that again was an impossible supposition, for, climber as he might be, he could not clamber where a monkey would fall. And, having stolen the letter, why had he hidden it, if, indeed, he had hidden it, as his straight walk to it seemed to prove? And why did he go now to get this letter from where it lay so securely concealed? Could it be that he had some interest in keeping Miss Lowther out of her patrimony? It was inconceivable—he had never been seen in the neighborhood till three weeks before. Yet he had run from Miss Lowther's presence—he had run, too, from the dying old man. To cap all, his knowledge of Beach House and what was in it was minute—that was certain. Whence came that knowledge?

Not less than a thousand queries, a thousand doubts, knocked at Sheldon's intelligence for solution throughout that sleepless night. Ultimately he sat up in his bed and laughed, for he found himself saying: "Have I really seen to-night what I seem to have seen? Am I not deeply dreaming?"

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And Storm! He was another oddity! It was more than curious, his notion of sleeping in the room where the murder had happened. That did not look like guilt. A murderer would sooner sleep in a pigsty—though, for that matter, since David Storm *had* been killed, it was impossible for the mind at any moment to forget that he and his nephew were enemies, and that Robert Storm benefited by his death. And the strangeness of Storm's behavior during the intrusion of Jessop into his house! He had not confronted and knocked down Jessop, as a masterful fellow like him might be expected to do. Storm would tackle any midnight thief that ever breathed, yet, after securing his revolver, he had refrained from shooting.

Finally, Storm had stolen the letter from the thief far more guiltily, darkly, sneakishly than the thief himself had stolen it. And the ghastliness of Storm's horror when the twice stolen letter had been stolen from him! Why such boundless despair! Why such horror? Did he, like Sheldon, and probably Jessop, know what it contained?

But Sheldon's racked thoughts always came back to this—the one perfectly certain fact: that the original criminal *was a climber*. Well, Jessop could climb—that was settled. Was Storm also a climber? Sheldon believed that Storm could climb, for he had the name of it, as he had the name for skill in many manly accomplishments. But was he such a climber as to get even half-way up the Black Nab on which

Sheldon's Ruse

stood Beach House without breaking every bone in his body? Of that Sheldon was not sure. If Storm could not, then there was no doubt of Jessop's guilt. If Storm could, then the affair became complex again.

The thing, then, was to obtain proof; and Sheldon, on seeing Storm's ghastly face after the loss of the letter, had made up his mind to determine this doubtful element in the case within six hours. It was for this reason, and none other, that he had hidden the letter in the leg of the table.

About ten o'clock in the morning of the following day he was walking along the cliffs, in the direction of Beach House, and with him was another of the Eskmouth constables, a man named Harris. And Sheldon said to Harris:

"You understand my scheme, so there needn't be any mistake. I've notched the table-leg just near the bottom, so that you'll know which is the one. As soon as you run into the room, unscrew the caster—here is a screw-driver—take out the sheets you will find in the hollow, and put them in your pocket. Then run to the center casement window, and call down to me and Storm: 'I have found the papers!' Without waiting for any order, throw out the other bundle of sheets, made of the same kind of paper, which I have given you. But take care to pitch them in the cleft in the rock you will see just beneath, so that they'll catch there, high up, yet beyond your reach. If you then see Mr. Storm start climbing the

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rock, well and good; but I'm not too sure that he'll do it, for he is a sharp-eyed devil, and the genuine sheets are quite yellow with age, while these, you see, are white, worse luck. So, if he makes no move, don't wait many seconds before you call down that you've made a mistake, and then you'll chuck out the real packet which you have taken from the table. Throw it just in the same way, into the crevice. Leave the rest to me."

"Right-o," said Harris.

"It's to be a race," explained Sheldon. "If Mr. Storm beats me in the climb, I'll have to be satisfied to lose the papers—that's all. But he'll have to look a bit slippery to manage that. Anyway, you understand the game?"

"I'm on," said Harris, a laconic person, but one to be trusted.

The two policemen turned down the path to the shore, walked to Beach House, and, while Harris went from Sheldon to request a few words with Mr. Storm on the sands, Sheldon himself walked out to the far end of the headland.

Presently Harris appeared, bearing the curt message from Storm that Sheldon must be an idiot. If he wanted to see Storm he must come into the house. Sheldon grinned.

"Back you go," he said, "and tell him to come at once, as it is *about the letter*. Just say those three words 'about the letter.'"

Again Harris vanished, and in five minutes returned

Sheldon's Ruse

with Storm, who strode up to Sheldon with an angry question in his eyes that asked before he said it: "What on earth is all this fuss about?"

Sheldon was affable, confidential, sure of his ground.

"You will forgive me, Mr. Storm, I know, when I explain," he said. "In fact, sir, walls have ears—there are servants in the house——" He broke off, in his queer way, to remark sympathetically: "I see, sir, that you don't look well this morning. Perhaps you didn't sleep well last night?"

The blazing sun, now shining down cloudless from the zenith, showed Storm's face pale and haggard, unshaven and careless of appearance. Sheldon himself was pale with agitation, but Storm saw nothing of that. Instead of the friendly tone of the policeman's inquiries after his health he seemed to discover a certain note of aggressiveness and challenge.

So he stared squarely at Sheldon. "What the deuce are you driving at?" he demanded. "You bring me out here—do you want to be reported for insolence?"

"Sir, a letter was stolen out of Beach House last night——"

Ah! that touched him, as well it might. That Sheldon should know of the night's doings was as miraculous to him as if a rock of the steel yonder had called with human tongue.

"How do you know that?" he muttered, piercing the other's face with red eyes.

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But Sheldon was annoyed by the word "insolence."

"That is not the point for the moment, Mr Storm," he said stiffly. "I believe it was the letter which Mr. David Storm left behind for Miss Lowther. I cannot be too sure, but that is my belief. And that letter is in the house *now*——"

"In the house?" Storm could not help repeating, a prey both to hope and amazement.

"Yes, and I believe I know where—in fact I am certain. It is in the leg of the table in the big front room."

The words were scarcely uttered before Storm made to be off, but Sheldon barred the way.

"No, Mr. Storm, please stop," he said firmly. "I wish to be the first to handle that letter, and, if you don't mind, Harris here will run and get it."

"What!" roared Storm, with a black brow: "in a man's own house!"

He dodged the policeman, and broke into a run. Sheldon, a good footballer, tackled him like a terrier on a rat, and a venomous struggle began which staggered and swayed wildly about—Harris, meantime, pelted along the sands for the house.

After a minute's sharp tussling Sheldon and Storm dropped together, Sheldon floored, Storm uppermost, but grimly and scientifically grasped by his adversary, and powerless, however he tugged, to drag himself free.

Sheldon's Ruse

While they were still in the thick of their struggle on the ground, from a window on high came Harris's shout:

"I've got it!"

"Throw it down!" shouted back Sheldon. With that, he let go his hold, and Storm rose. In his rage he aimed a kick at the other, which would have lamed him but for his exceeding smartness.

In the next instant Storm's eyes were directed to the white paper which Harris had thrown upon the lichened rock; and while he peered upward, Sheldon cried:

"Dash it all! they've stuck! . . . Well, I'll soon lay hands on them!"

He sprang at the rock, but Storm did not follow. Despite his rage he had detected, in the glaring sunlight, that the paper on the rock was not that which he had lost during the night.

Indeed, he was about to start, for the third time, into running inland, for the house, when Harris, seeing that Storm did not climb, obeyed orders.

"I made a mistake!" he yelled. "Here you are!"—and again he flung out a roll of paper, which likewise stuck in the same niche, not far from the first batch.

One instant's upward glance was enough now for Storm. "*By the living—!*" Sheldon could just hear him hiss to himself. Instantly he turned to race over the sand for the house, but, in turning, he saw

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Sheldon actively climbing. He flew to grab at Sheldon's foot, but just missed it.

Then Storm, snarling, "Oh, no, you don't!" leaped after him.

The race had begun.

CHAPTER X

THE LETTER

SHELDON'S left foot at that moment was only a few inches above the reach of Storm's outstretched hand. In less than twenty seconds afterwards Sheldon had ascertained what he wanted to know—that Storm was a climber, that Storm could scale the Black Nab rock—but the knowledge came to a heart frozen by fear, for not only could Storm climb the rock, but he was as great an expert as Sheldon himself, and it instantly became apparent that he was in a condition of frenzy. In a word, he would not hesitate to pull Sheldon down, and it would be almost impossible to prove that he had acted designedly. At consciousness of this fact, Sheldon felt his feet break into a chilly perspiration, his eyes seemed to capsize an instant in his head, and his brain reeled in darkness.

But he was a brave man, and the emotion was only transient. Thirty feet from the ground he felt a finger touch the heel of his left boot—with a touch so light that only nerves stretched to the very intensity of sensitiveness could have been aware of it. He shrank upward with the agility of horror with

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which he would have flinched from the darting head of a poisonous snake.

"This man is a murderer!" he gasped then to the impassive rock, putting all the passion of his soul and muscles into the struggle for life and success, for, when life itself is at stake, then a man will strive harder than for all the gold in the Indies.

The thought, meantime, did not fail to occur to him, that by turning somewhat aside, and making a detour, he would be sure to save his neck, since Storm's greed to seize the letter would certainly keep him straight on. But Sheldon's will was as eagerly and doggedly set upon the letter as Storm's, and the formation of the rock was such that if he inclined either to right or left he could not make up lost ground in the final rush. So he set his teeth and kept a stout heart, tearing himself upward, springing like a goat when opportunity served, his whole soul in his toes and fingers, at one moment catching sight of Harris's strained face above at the casement as in a dream-world a hundred miles remote from him, at another losing Harris and all but the sky when an outward bulge of the rock hid the house.

Sheldon's hands were fifty feet from the ground, and barely a couple of yards from the letter, when again his boot was touched—for that dogged and silent agent of destruction chasing him from below had gained a little upon him.

At that moment, if Sheldon had possessed a pistol,

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he would have shot Storm dead, for he understood that another ten seconds would see him hurtling down to the serried boulders at the base of the rock. And again the word "murderer" panted from his parched lips, but, when his case seemed most desperate, he had a stroke of luck. His left hand happened to touch a pocket of loose earth and moss in a crevice. Gasping "Thank God!" he rained it plenteously down into his pursuer's eyes, even while the foot that had been touched escaped as from the chase of fire. Ten seconds more, and Sheldon was smiling with a crooked mouth, the pride in the man conquering his horror and agitation. He had reached, and grasped the letter.

In the few feet still left before he could clutch Harris's extended hand he was safe. He had time even to look down and see Storm clearing his blurred eyes, but still coming. As soon as he leaped through the window, he cried in a shrill falsetto to Harris "Come!" and they hurried off.

Storm made no attempt to follow them. The drama of the rock-face could not be succeeded by the comedy of a struggle with two policemen on the highroad.

Within thirty minutes Sheldon was in his lodgings, bent over the letter, reading it again as greedily as the desert wanderer drinks at the oasis.

And this was what he read:

To Eunice Lowther, my dear: God bless you for a good girl.

The House of Silence

These words you will read in a locked room, alone, on the day of my death, if the paper on which I write is not previously purloined from you, a not impossible thing. In case it should be, I have deposited with Mr. Rooper, my solicitor, a small fund, of which he will tell you two months after my death, which will keep you going for a year, and six months after my death he will write on your behalf to a bank in London wherein lies deposited a sealed packet containing the hiding-places of nine wills of mine, all in your favor. Thus it will come about that those who have defrauded you, after enjoying the sweets of possession for six months, and reveling in the joy of hurting her whom I love, will find gall in their wine, and, if there is knowledge in the grave, their gall will cause my cold eyes to glow.

Forgive me, dear one, if I appear unduly malignant to you—your poor friend has been wronged.

As you read on, you will see why it is that I have not deposited this letter with a lawyer to be handed to you on my death in the ordinary way; and also why I have not done the same thing with my will. Truth to tell, I have killed a man—innocently enough, be it said—and I have attempted to kill myself. Forgive, forgive, that I should offend your eyes with such words! But so it was, and the past cannot be altered. Now, this sorry story is not known in our neighborhood. I have a fairly good name among men of respectability, which I do not care to forfeit; and I did not wish you to receive this letter from a lawyer's hand, lest, through a glance at its contents, you should betray in his presence those emotions which its perusal will probably produce in you. Nor did I wish to deposit it with a lawyer with such words as "to be read in private" written on the envelope, since this would have had a note of mystery which it is well to avoid.

As for the will itself, you will see that my reason for not depositing it with a local lawyer was that it contains a clause which others would probably regard as malignant, in which clause, moreover, reference is made to my at-

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tempted suicide, which I was reluctant to have known—at any rate during my life. I therefore drew up a very brief holograph will, of which I made thirteen copies, twelve of them being hidden in Beach House—and let who can find them!—the thirteenth lies in the sealed packet in the London Bank, in which packet is told the hiding-places of nine, while the hiding-places of three I will tell you in this letter. The witnesses to all of them are my coachman, John Bridges, and Henry Walter Maldon, mason, of Eskmouth.

You will see, dear, that my reason for making so many wills, and my reason for concealing them with so much precaution, is that I was threatened that they would be taken from me, as a riposte for a will that I myself once destroyed. I know that attempts, aye, more than one, have already been made to that end. And as I cherish some pardonable pride in the forced ingenuity which I have had to expend in their hiding, I beg you, dear, to keep the secrets of the hiding-places in your own breast, even when such keeping may be useless to you, so that thus there may be some secrets between you and me when I am gone. That was an added reason why I did not deposit this letter in a lawyer's hand, lest by chance any other than you might discover any of the hiding-places, over which, I confess, I have gloated a little in secret.

My dear, I love you well, and I regret to have to trouble your dear heart with the story of sorrow which follows. I do it in the well-grounded fear lest a malicious version of the facts may some day be given you, and that your love may turn from your friend in his mute tomb. A malicious version has already been given to my son, John Storm, and to my sister, Ethel Storm, by the man Robert Storm; and what has been done once may be done again.

Eunice, never believe anything you hear against your friend! You are now, as I write, but fourteen years old, but you have much sense, and you know I would liefer die than write to my dear a lie.

I will tell it as briefly as I can.

There were four of us—myself, the eldest and best, and

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then Richard, and then Ethel, and then Harold, the youngest, the profligate, whom I shot with my own hand. Our father's name was Richard Chariton Storm—we scarce knew our mother; she had died when Harold was an infant—and our father was a crusty old man, a hermit, a miser, though very rich, secretive as the grave, for ever inventing hiding-places—why I have now only the vaguest idea. I think this trait of secretiveness runs in our blood.

Well, from the time he was fourteen, Harold began to take the wrong road—drank, gambled, could not be kept at home—as wild a spirit, I suppose, as ever the moon looked down on, and certainly touched with lunacy. Richard and I didn't much care—and I don't imagine that his father did, except when Harold went to him for money, so that Harold was rather left to run as wild as he liked; and by the time he was twenty there would be weeks in which Hargen Hall would see very little of him, and no one would quite know whereabouts Harold was dancing along the road to ruin. My sister was a curiously colorless woman. She died of diphtheria at the age of nineteen.

I see now that I was to blame for Harold's fall—I was the eldest, I should have tried more than I did to check him. But, to tell the truth, we were not brought up to be a loving sort of family; we were taught to love money, and go our own road, everyone for himself, and the devil take the hindermost. My father was an antiquary—what he did not know of the ancient world was not worth knowing! and when he bothered himself to say anything to us others, it was always something about Thoth, or Pasht, or Phthah—something Egyptian, or something Assyrian. He was also somewhat of a botanist, and, hidden in his den in the south tower where he studied, thought far more of his hobbies than of his sons.

And yet I had a fondness for him, and would often try to force myself upon his company. I can say this with truth, for I remember it distinctly.

Of course, I was the heir, and the old man, who had a hard and stubborn head, let it be distinctly understood that he was not going to split up the estate between us. I must

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provide for Ethel; Richard and Harold, he said, must shift for themselves, as the estate would practically be entailed. This did not tend to increase Richard's and Harold's love for me.

For myself, I will swear that I never disliked Harold; but I confess that from my boyhood I should never have been willing to die for Richard, though Richard would have liked me to.

Richard, in his way, was just as wild a devil as Harold, though instead of showing itself in drink and breaking girls' hearts, it took the less flagrant form of breaking horses' necks and wind. He rode as furiously as witches on their broomsticks riding the hurricane, and would kill horse after horse as recklessly as a man smokes cigarette after cigarette, and tosses away the ends. And he had Harold's passion for gambling, too—only Harold gambled on horses, and Richard on stocks and shares; and whereas Harold, poor cub, always lost, Richard generally won. In fact, Richard was only a respectable edition of Harold—and a far more hateful edition, for Harold was only mad, but Richard was hard; and though we had all been brought up with a fondness for Mammon, neither of us two, Harold and myself, ever had that hard-headed acquisitiveness, that greedy avarice, in anything like the same degree that Richard and the old man had it. That is why, I think, in his heart the old man liked Richard the best, or disliked him the least, because they were birds of a feather, even though I was to inherit everything, being the eldest. Once Richard bought a stallion that had in it the same seven devils of stubbornness that lived in himself. For he had heard the fame of the beast—that it had never been, and could not be, broken in—which was enough to make him buy it. So he got on it one afternoon with an oath—I shall ever remember the tragic mood of that day—swearing that he'd ride it to very death, his own, or the brute's. An hour afterwards he was brought home insensible, all blood-stained, apparently dead, his skull split open. And for three days the old man kept pottering and muttering about the room where Richard lay, neglecting his plants and curios and Egyptian dynasties. I thought then to myself: "If it

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had been I that was ill, he wouldn't have troubled like this."

It was I who ought to have been the favorite—not Richard; for I was much the best of them, a fairly quiet fellow, inclined to be nice to everybody, and not spending much money; though, I admit, I was given to fits of rambling, and was sometimes sullen and solitary. But, then, in a family, it is always the least troublesome and the best-behaved who is most trampled on.

For years I had never done anything to cause scandal or offense, until, just when I was twenty-seven, Richard twenty-five, and Harold twenty, in one of my rambles over the country I saw a girl of humble class at a farm, whom I privately married four days after we first met. A mad act, but honorable. By what means the marriage ever became known I am still in ignorance; but a month later, when I got back to Hargen Hall, a smile was on Richard's face, and in my first talk with my father, he calmly informed me that I was disinherited for my low conduct, as he had made a will in Richard's favor.

Then something like a hell of enmity commenced to reign and rage in the house. I charged Richard with having ferreted out the fact of the marriage and told it to my father with exaggerations. He admitted this, and I then said to him: "Do you really suppose you will gain anything by it? All the wills in the world will not help you to touch a penny of what I have been brought up to regard as mine." This he took to be a threat that I meant to find and destroy the will; for my father, with his inveterate secrecy of mind, had made a holograph will, and had hidden it in one of those inscrutable hiding-places of his into which—without object that I know of—he used to tuck away his rare old documents and other things. Promptly Richard went and warned his father that I meant to lay hands on the will.

Now, I am not going to say that I never looked for the will; I did. But I'll take my oath that I never found any will. Nor did I look long; for in the midst of my search I had the thought: "I won't search myself, but I'll set to work on it a keener wit than mine, which won't fail." And I

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waited till Harold Storm next presented himself at Hargen Hall.

Harold was a clever lunatic—so much so, that I'll venture to say that few keener brains, be it Caesar's or Newton's, ever twitched their brows at a problem on this earth. Especially in any non-practical matter—he would "arrive" somehow, if he was sober. As a schoolboy, though he hardly ever seemed to look into a book, he always knew ten times more than any other boy. He was bright enough and a handsome strip-ling—very: though so unlucky—cursed from his birth, poor fellow. And he was far more favorable to me than to Richard; so I knew that, if I made him large offers both of present and future help, and put him on to the task of finding the will, he would tackle it *con amore*. All this sounds rather trivial and foolish, but life is made up of such things.

Well, three months after the marriage Harold came home like a bad penny, looking very rumped and troubled—though barely twenty—with a curious flitting light in his eyes that time, like a hunted creature plotting in haste how to escape. I believe it is now said that the idea that "lunacy," which means "moon-sickness," has really anything to do with the moon is a superstition; but I could take my oath that Harold Storm's mental state had some connection with the phases of the moon, and that when there was no moon, as there was none *then*, he was ever more mad, or less sane.

Anyway, when I approached him on the subject of the will, as I did the very first night of his arrival—for my father had just had a second attack of heart-failure, and was expected to be dead any day—when I approached Harold, he confessed to me that he had done something wrong, and was in fear of the police, unless he could raise £1,700 without delay. I could only lay my hand on £900 at the moment, and I told him he was welcome to that, as well as to an annuity of £700 on the old man's death, on condition that he could give me the disinheriting will. As for his present needs, he could no doubt screw £800 out of the old man, I said, which, with my £900, would make the £1,700 that he wanted. But he must find the will first, I said, before I

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parted with the £900; and he struck the bargain, saying that he would put his wits at once to work. Are you lawyer enough to realize that if my father died intestate, I succeeded to all the real estate, being the eldest son?

Well, the next morning, Harold approached his father about the £800; and that hard old man gave him a flat refusal. Imagine now the cub's agonies of want, his livid hatred—with the moon, as I say, where it was. He at once set himself to the quest of the will with venom—though what was in his mind in doing so is not very clear to me, for he had told me that less than the £1,700 was no good to him, and even if he found the will, he could get from me no more than £900. But understand this, that supposing he found the will, and supposing—I say supposing—his dying old father happened to die that day, then he would get all he wanted, and more, for I should be rich. Bear that in mind.

Well, his brains and hands were on the hunt for that will all that day, and he was like a quick spirit haunting Hargen Hall. At seven in the evening he found it; but, with his usual bad luck, he was stooping at some recondite crevice, a lamp behind him, and as his hand went out to get the will, another hand was before his—his father's. Now, to discover a hiding-place of my father's was to incur his everlasting wrath. He ordered Harold out of the house, never to return, and then went out for his after-dinner walk, with, it appears, the will in his pocket.

Sheldon's education was of the self-acquired variety—perhaps the best type, for practical purposes. But he did not know the meaning of "recondite," so he turned to a small dictionary and found it briefly defined as "secret: hidden: abstruse: out of the way." He nodded his head sagely.

"Good word," he muttered. "Fits this affair to a T. Fits me, too, for I am acting that way. Now, if this letter remains 'recondite' to everybody

The Letter

but me and Robert Storm for six months—what happens? Miss Eunice Lowther will be rather poor, just able to live decently, I expect. Ah! Robert Storm and myself.”

And he hugged the notion, for he was sure that Robert Storm would soon be a discredited adversary.

CHAPTER XI

THE LEGACY

DELIBERATELY putting aside the thought which had disturbed him, the policeman continued his reading of the letter:

It was winter, near Christmas, and it was already dark when the old man went out into the park to peer and poke among botanical weeds. Well, it became rather late, and though it was raining a little, he did not come back. Richard and I met in the smoking-room, and a terrible quarrel arose between us. He asked if I did set on Harold to steal the will, and then, when the old man put the will in his pocket, if I had urged Harold to murder him—for he knew all that I knew, since the row between the old man and Harold had been loud, and we two others had hurried to the spot. So when Richard accused me of this, I threatened, and made as if I would knock him down, for I was much stronger and bigger than he. On this he produced from a drawer a pistol—a small Venetian weapon, mounted in silver, with the initials H. S. on it, the same which in my will I now bequeath to Richard's son, Robert Storm, for it is a murderous little weapon, with a genius for death. However, I had no wish to be shot, nor Richard to be hanged, and presently he violently tossed down the weapon on the table, and hurried out to seek his father, with a feeling no doubt that his interests were at stake that night.

Ten minutes afterwards, I, too, sallied out to seek the old man; and I had in my hand the pistol—in my pocket a box of cartridges which accompanied it—I cannot recall now

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why I took it up off the table—it is all so long ago that I forget the passing motives of a minute—but I remember finding it in my hand soon after I went out, and remembered thinking that it was not a night on which I ought to have a weapon about me, and that Richard had probably thought so, too, when he had tossed the weapon on the table on going out. I was just going to throw it out of my hand in the park when—now mark the workings of fate—I thought that I wouldn't. For it was Harold's pistol, I had a feeling in me that Harold was up to something wrong that night, and I was afraid, if his pistol was found in the shrubbery, the discovery might be bad for the poor cub. Still, I wouldn't keep the thing on me, and when I had reached the boundary wall of the park without having seen, or rather heard—for the night was too utterly black to see anything—without having heard anything of my father, I went into the ruins of the chapel-of-ease on the skirts of the park—you must have often seen it, dear—to hide away or bury the weapon in the bracken there. My nerves were in a ghastly state of funk, I suppose, and in the darkness my hair kept stirring with nervousness.

Well, I went into the chapel-of-ease, where it was utterly rayless, and then fumbled my way down the four broken steps into the exposed vault or crypt, which was overgrown with bracken. I was just stooping to drop the pistol in a corner for the time being, when I felt my right thigh wounded. It was only a scratch really; but try to imagine my chill of fright, remembering that I couldn't see my hand before my eyes in that hole, and that I had been in a condition of nervous jumpiness before. What I thought was that an animal had bitten me—a wild cat or badger, or something—for it felt rather like a bite, and in an instant I had shot off the wretched thing which I was just about to drop.

I heard something fall, and then I waited; and then I heard a death-rattle in a human throat, and I knew then that my hand had shot a man.

God help me, I had no matches, a trivial fact, which was destined to cost me dear. So, with a shrinking in my fingers that you could never fancy, I touched the limp form that was there, to see if he had any matches in his pocket. He had

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some papers and letters, which I instinctively stuffed into my own pocket to lead to his identification when I was free to examine them, since I fancied that he was some tramp seeking shelter there—but he had no matches. And when his low ghastly purring suddenly stopped, I rushed from him.

I ran to the house—I suppose to get a light—but, instead, I sat locked in my study some half-an-hour, shivering and staring there; and then I sprang up, reloaded the pistol, drank some brandy, took a candle and matches, and went out to go back to the chapel-of-ease.

But in the next room Richard met me. He looked a little at my wild face—and he had quick-seeing eyes—then he said:

“Well, I suppose you know that father has been murdered? They have just brought him in.”

I couldn't speak. He looked at me. Suddenly he hissed:

“Why, *it is you who have shot him.*”

I blazed into wrath at that. “Take care, Richard!” I said. “Take care! A little more of you, and I—”

“Why,” said he, “I can see the pistol you did it with bulging your right pocket, and there in your left pocket is the will which was in his!”

With this he made a furious rush to snatch a paper that was sticking a little out of my pocket—a paper that I had taken from the pocket of the man shot in the chapel-of-ease. But he did not succeed. I slipped round the table, took out the paper, saw that it was in truth my father's will leaving all to Richard, and tossed it on the fire just behind me. Richard rushed to rescue it, but I kept him off; it burned to ashes.

Then I sat down at the table, and thought. Richard kept on raving at me, telling me, I think, that it was folly to suppose that the destruction of the will would save me from the rope, since *he* was a witness to my having had it, that I had shot my father, and my only wise course was suicide while I had a little time. I didn't much heed his revilings. I was sad. It was certain to me that I had really shot the old man—for there were the ashes of the will to prove it, and I thought that he must have gone into the chapel-of-ease to invent there a new hiding-place, and I had shot him dead,

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my own father. Indeed, I was the saddest man in England that night. So when Richard said something about suicide, all at once, before ever I knew that I had contemplated such a thing, I was crying out:

"All right, Richard, you shall have it all! Look, Richard, look!"

And with that I opened my mouth, and shot a bullet into it. . . .

Down I dropped; but when I waited to die, I didn't die. Some men-servants rushed in, and put me to bed.

The next day I got up, apparently pretty well, in a state of dull agony, but able to move. And I then learned that the corpse of Harold, as well as the corpse of his father, was in the house. Harold had been shot through the heart.

But I also learned this fact—that the old man had not been shot—he had been stabbed.

And Richard had known this—that foul hound—had known that I was innocent, at the time when he suggested suicide to me. For I discovered afterwards that Richard had been near when Harold had stabbed his father and seized the will, that Harold had discovered that Richard knew of the deed, that Harold must have fled, distracted as he was that night, to hide from Richard in the chapel-of-ease, and that when Harold tried to stab me there, inflicting the random scratch which I had taken to be an animal's bite, it was Richard whom he meant to stab, thinking that Richard was hunting him.

However, I had shot Harold—it was only homicide, not murder—but Richard knew of my deed, and, to save myself from trouble, I let him have the estate, and the eternal curse of my heart with it, he letting me have Beach House and about £3,000 a year, on condition of mutual silence.

Well, I brought my wife to Beach House, months passed, and my son, John Storm, was already born, when one day I had an epileptic fit; then fit after fit, fifty, a hundred a day. The doctor, who knew that I had shot myself, saw that the bullet was affecting my brain. In University College Hospital, London, my skull was trepanned. Unfortunately, as the surgeon was going to touch the bullet, it slipped, and the brain

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was bruised. So from that day, though the fits ceased, the advance of the paralysis which set in has been as steady as it has been slow.

They say that in the week when I began to have the fits Richard Storm gave a ball at Hargen Hall. The man hated me madly. He thought himself poor because I had Beach House, and ill because I was alive.

In my third year at Beach House my sister Ethel died; four years later Richard Storm's son, Robert, was born.

When this happened, Richard Storm sent a messenger to say to me that he had only granted Beach House to me personally, not to my children; that at my death, all that I had retained must revert to his son; that, as a criminal, I had really no right to anything; and that it was useless for me to make any will leaving aught to my son or wife, as he would find means to destroy it, as I had destroyed his father's; while, as to my son, he knew what he would do. He claimed certain other family documents which I had kept, and threatened to secure them by fair means or foul.

Several attempts in this sense were made during the course of years. Beach House, I know, was entered by night and partly searched; and when my boy was nineteen two documents of mine disappeared one night.

After that for a long time my son, John, and I used to vie with each other in inventing hiding-places, until it became a habit, as it had been with my father before me. The boy and I were much attached to each other, and I had brought him up in the same bitter hatred of the family at Hargen Hall in which Richard Storm was bringing up his son Robert of the family at Beach House. But those two had more cunning in their heads than John Storm, and more clanship for each other than John for me, as it proved.

They waited till my wife died in John's twenty-fourth year; and then Robert Storm, a lad of only seventeen, met John and got it into John's head that it was I really who had killed my father and brother, and that all I had ever told John were lies; and he proved what he said to John by forged papers. My boy came home to me stung into a being all shame and gall and deafness of wrath.

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Dear one, I have told you of that scene. My son and I parted forever. When my servants barred the door to his desperation, he climbed down the rock and I saw him swim away down the lane between the steel. Something seemed to say then to my broken heart that along that same black reef I should see him come back with a milder mind—but come too late—for my death would be due to his coming. And this feeling has never left me.

Left utterly alone, I adopted you on your parents' death—to the bitterness of Hargen Hall. And that was the best thing I ever did for myself. God bless you, Eunice, for a good girl.

I believe that in another three months the paralysis will have reached my hands, and in another ten months my tongue. I look then to you to be good to me; and I write you this while I may.

That is all I would say to you now. Judge me mildly. We are all faulty, but some day, a million years hence, men may be better, for God is good, and, I conjecture, is ever at work to bring out of sorrow joy.

Good-by.

(1) One of my wills you will find scratched in the quicksilver on the back of a broken piece of mirror among a lot of rubbish in the lumber-room. It consists, like the others, of the words: "This is my last will and testament. I bequeath to Eunice Lowther all my possessions, save my Venetian pistol marked 'H.S.' with which I shot myself, bequeathed to Robert Storm;" and then the signatures.

(2) Another you will find wrapped round the central screw of that one of the French candelabra that has a chip in the porcelain, standing on the old piano in the music-room.

(3) A third you will find engraved in the rock of a hole in the Black Nab on which Beach House stands. The hole is just under the central window, looking directly seaward; and is nine feet down from the window.

I can write no more. I am ever

Your loving friend and adopted uncle,

DAVID STORM.

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Sheldon mechanically reached for his pipe when he had made an end of the many closely-written sheets.

"Mad—all of 'em," he said. "Mad as March hares. Now, I suppose that sort of thing runs in the blood, and, if so, that fellow Jessop, conceited ass, must be somehow of the same kith and kin."

At this a notion occurred to Sheldon that caused him to pick up the letter again and scan some pages of it hurriedly.

"By gad!" he said, after a careful re-reading of certain passages. "By gad, if *that* were it, matters would be complicated. And then—where do I stand? Steady, my boy; keep a tight hand on yourself. Yet the woman is worth it. She is . . . She is! With her as my wife, and the backing of her wealth, I could do things. . . . I feel it in me. . . . They say that every man gets a chance once in his life. Is this mine?"

There came a knock at the cottage door, and Sheldon went to open it, for his landlady was hanging out washing in a small garden at the rear.

Instantly the whole street seemed to be filled with the portly presence of Inspector Hunter.

"Hello, Sheldon!" he said, with his foot on the step.

"Did you want me, sir?" said Sheldon. But he didn't move. David Storm's letter was lying open on the table in his tiny room.

CHAPTER XII

SOME CROSS PURPOSES

Few things happen in Britain that are unaffected by the weather, and the mystery of that house of silence perched in solitude on the blunt spur of rock jutting forth into the North Sea was no exception to the rule. In these isles heavy rain in early summer is usually the forerunner of heat, but the glorious uncertainty of the British climate brought it about for once that the tropical downpour of Tuesday should be succeeded by a bitter wind from the north on Thursday.

Hence, Inspector Hunter, the great man of the Criminal Investigation Department, ceased to feel the superabundant weight of his flesh, and took thought over his breakfast of eggs and bacon. Thus far, Scotland Yard had not exactly dissipated the mental haziness of Eskmouth. David Storm was dead and buried, his "heiress" was dispossessed, his hated nephew was installed in Beach House, and nothing—absolutely nothing—had been done that warranted the employment of a detective-inspector from headquarters.

Now, Hunter was a shrewd man. He had brought

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many noted criminals to justice, and his long experience had taught him that the motive of any given crime might with confidence be attributed to greed, love, or revenge.

"That's the formula," he thought, helping himself to a third rasher, "money comes first, sixty per cent.; woman is a good second, thirty per cent.; hate and the minor elements may be lumped up in the remaining ten. But when you have money plus the woman, why look any further? Good! Who has got the money? Robert Storm. Is there a woman? Yes, an uncommonly attractive one, Eunice Lowther. Who wants her? Robert Storm again. Then it comes to this—Jessop or no Jessop, Robert Storm killed his uncle. Queer thing—that young sprig, Sheldon, has hinted at the notion from the beginning. Maybe I jumped at conclusions just at the moment I was warning him against the bad habit. Dash the hot weather! I must bant, or I'll lose grip."

He lit a pipe, and was ticking off some memoranda when the boots of the hotel came into the coffee-room, which was otherwise untenanted, for the Inspector was an early bird.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the man, who had shed some of his Yorkshire shyness by association with sharp-tongued commercial travelers and would-be Cockney humorists visiting Eskmouth in the summer, "beg pardon, sir, but I s'pose you know that Mr. Jessop kem back here yesterday."

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"Yes, I know," said Hunter, turning his big eyes on the man.

"He kem here in a trap about two o'clock."

"Yes."

"And the trap is in the stable yet."

"Good," said Hunter, apparently much relieved. Being a Londoner, he could hardly guess that a Yorkshireman would fall dead before coming to the point in a sentence, but he had long ago learnt the advisability of letting a witness tell his story in his own words.

"Well," continued boots, after a quick glance at the door, "Mr. Jessop was out all the afternoon an' evening, an' wot time do you think he kem in?"

"Very late," was the sapient answer.

"Rather. It was nigh on three o'clock this mornin'."

"You don't say," cried Hunter, who was far more surprised than he seemed to be.

"An' wot's more, he was all mud an' moss, an' tired to death—that fagged out he could hardly climb upstairs to bed."

Somehow, "moss" and "climb" were suggestive words.

"Have you cleaned his boots?" asked the Inspector suddenly.

"The fact is, sir, I'm a bit late with things——"

"You haven't, eh? Where is your den?"

"In the yard, sir."

"Come along; show me Mr. Jessop's boots."

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Seizing an envelope from a writing-table, he followed the man to the back premises. From the artist's boots Mr. Hunter scraped no small quantity of lichen, which he put into the envelope.

"Now, where are Mr. Jessop's clothes?" he said.

"In his room, sir. He hasn't bin called——"

"Go there. Wake him up, and ask if you may take away the suit he wore last night, to brush it. Bring the lot here, to me."

Boots returned, suspicion quivering in his voice.

"He swore at me, sir, an' tole me to wait till he dam well rang."

"Did he?" exclaimed Mr. Hunter. "Well, there! An imperious young man, Mr. Jessop. Now, I want you to keep a shut mouth about his comings and goings. Here's half a crown for you. By the way, his room is 36, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective strolled upstairs. For such a stout man he had a singularly quiet footfall, and he was listening at the door of Jessop's room without having given any indication of his presence. For his pains he only heard the creak of a bed, as if its weary occupant were turning in vain effort to woo sleep. He knocked.

"Come in," said an angry voice, and "What the——" began Jessop when he saw the Inspector's huge bulk in the doorway.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Jessop," cried the detective cheerfully, "but I was told you were

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awake, so I took the opportunity of having that little talk you promised me some days since."

"I am horribly tired," protested Jessop, raising himself on an elbow. "I have not been many hours in bed——"

"That is your own fault," said the affable Hunter. "If you fix on the small hours of the morning for visits to another man's house, and climb into it in preference to using the front door, you must expect not only to be tired, but to be intruded on by inquisitive policemen who ask questions."

Now, Hunter had in his pocket some of the Black Nab lichen taken from Jessop's boots—lichen which, he had come to believe, grew only on that exposed rock—and he had seen the telltale stains on Jessop's clothes hanging over the end of the bed. Moreover, his eyes roamed from Jessop's drawn face to the electric lamp sticking out of the gaping mouth of the black bag: so he hazarded a creditable guess.

Jessop sat up, and wound his arms about his knees, on which the bed-clothes rose tent-wise.

"So *you* know?" he said, and the words were not exactly those that Hunter expected to hear.

"Yes," he said, "something, not all."

"Have you seen that blusterer, Storm? Has he missed it?"

"I have not seen Mr. Storm, so cannot tell what he may have missed."

"Then how——"

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The Inspector raised a fat hand.

"In this affair *I* am the interrogator. I seek, but may not often give, information. I shall be glad to have your full and explicit reasons for entering Beach House last night, Mr. Jessop, but you must be warned——"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Jessop. "Keep your warnings for those who need them. *I* didn't kill that old man. If one may not marry one's grandmother it is still more improbable that one would want to murder one's grandfather."

"Grandfather!"

The firm jelly of Mr. Hunter's frame quivered a little. Jessop, whose eyes were introspective, whose mind was weighing and puzzling, saw nothing of this. He was seemingly quite blind to the fact that his admission had supplied that which the police were seeking for—a motive.

"Yes, grandfather!" he repeated. "I am the son of old David Storm's son. In the absence of a will, every stick and stone in Beach House belongs to me, and no man is free to dispute my right of entry by any means or method I choose to adopt. I can drop into it from a balloon or drive a tunnel to it from the cliff if I like, Mr. Inspector, so put that in your pipe and smoke it, or, better still, help yourself to a cigarette from that box on the dressing-table, and soothe your official breast while I clear up some of the things that have bothered you. But, before I say another word, I must have your definite

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promise that what I tell you shall remain a secret known only to yourself."

Hunter began to perspire again—a bad sign: but then, how could he possibly have foreseen such a development?

"I'm afraid," he said hesitatingly, but Jessop cut him short with a scornful laugh.

"Of course, your promise will cease to be binding if you prove that I am an avicide. Have you any Latin? No—Well, I make you a present of a new word, which ought to demonstrate how rare the crime must be if the world has run through so many æons without feeling the necessity of coining a name for it."

"A bit cracked, like all these artist fellows," thought Hunter. It would be interesting to have followed his reasoning had he but read that letter of David Storm's which had kept Sheldon tossing in sleeplessness throughout the night. Perhaps he might have inquired into the moon's phases.

"Do get the cigarettes, and give me one," cried Jessop. "One ought not to smoke before breakfast, of course, but this is a special occasion, and my nerves are a bit jarred. It will do me good. Thanks—the matches are in that pocket. By the way, you will find an envelope there. Take it, and examine it when I reach a point in my story where it becomes an exhibit. I know the jargon, you see. But, your promise to be secret first, please."

"Subject to the all-important fact that I am here

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to bring to justice the man who killed Mr. Storm, I promise what you ask, Mr. Jessop."

The other pondered the phrase.

"Among men of honor that would mean your complete acceptance of the bond, unless you are convinced that I am the murderer?"

"Yes," admitted the detective instantly.

"Very well, I take it in that spirit. But, having begun by being discursive, let us continue. Why do you assume that David Storm was killed?"

"The medical evidence shows that he had been maltreated. There were finger-marks on his throat. The law is quite explicit, Mr. Jessop. The slightest intentional act that brings about another's death is murder. For instance, the least push will send a man toppling over a precipice. Nobody would deny that such a push would be the commission of a murder, but the law says that the same principle applies to more abstruse cases. If, to your knowledge, the mere lifting of a paralyzed old man out of bed will kill him, and you lift him out with proved intent, then you are a murderer."

Jessop smiled grimly, but the hand that was stretched out for a match did not tremble, nor did he worry about the detective's remarkable willingness to answer some questions and not others.

"Still, I am in doubt as to your conclusions," he said. "I heard the old fellow give an eldritch screech, and jumped off the bed where I was lying, fully dressed; so only a few seconds elapsed before

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I was in his room. He was living then, laid out stiffly on the floor, but suggesting a vivified mummy, a terrifying object. I recognized him and he recognized me. I suppose, in such moments, our brains and eyes insensibly go for the cardinal features of humanity. I saw in him the withered reflex of my father. He saw in me the young sapling of the same stock. By gad, it was eerie and tingling. Besides, he pointed at me, evidently trying hard to tell his niece and the others, when they ran in, what he had discovered. If I hadn't been wide-awake I should have fancied that he had entered my room and had seen me, and that the shock bowled him over."

"He—pointed—at you?" said Hunter slowly.

"Yes. Haven't they told you?—Miss Lowther or the servants? Well, it is so."

Big beads of perspiration stood on the domed forehead of Inspector Hunter, for he was thinking hard now. But he heeded them not. Before his mind's eye danced a fantastic imagery, which took the shape, not of Jessop, or Storm, or Eunice, but of a man in the uniform of a policeman. Had Sheldon known of this pointing; if so, why had he not spoken of it to the representative of Scotland Yard charged with the inquiry?

"Go on, Mr. Jessop. Tell your story in your own way," he managed to say in unemotional tones. That is the best of having a formula, even for the set phrases of conversation. The voice fits into a worn groove, and does not betray.

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"Oddly enough, I have very little to tell," said Jessop, blowing rings with the smoke of the cigarette. "Until that moment—until I set eyes on David Storm, I mean—I had not realized that I was in Beach House. You must remember that I was dragged into it, through a hell of raging water, by the finest girl I've ever—Oh, the pity of it!"—

He stopped, seemed to choke down something poignant and bitter, and went on again:

"I had a dim wondering earlier that night, as to the evil that mad chance might have brought on me; but it passed. Miss Lowther's name, her appearance, the sheer absurdity of connecting her with my unhappy family, all conspired to lull my vague doubting when I heard of Robert Storm's presence."

"Where?" snapped Hunter.

"He sent in a message, saying that he wished to speak to her. She spurned him, just as I would have done. How could I guess?"

"Guess what?"

"That she was——" Jessop was about to say—"that she was David Storm's niece"—whereupon Hunter might have enlightened him, since the detective was well aware that Eunice was the child of an old friend of Storm's, committed to his care by her father when at the point of death in India—but Jessop's eyes chanced to fall on the envelope, which Hunter had placed on the bed after taking it from the coat-pocket. A movement of Jessop's feet un-

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der the counterpane had caused the crinkled and faded bit of paper to roll over, and, oddly enough, it suggested emptiness.

The young man leaned forward, seized it, peered inside, and gave an elfin shout.

“I’ve been robbed,” he bellowed, “robbed here while I slept. Poor, poor girl, what misery have I not brought on her! . . . Search, man, search! Have you dropped it? Give me that coat.”

Peer and pry as they might, and Jessop leaped out of bed and dived beneath the valance in frantic ransacking of every possible corner, they found nothing but the empty husk of a letter addressed simply “Eunice.” The kernel had gone, and with it had gone no small part of Jessop’s wits.

In broken, jerky sentences he told something of the scene in the hut and by the side of the mill in Rindscarp Gill. He recounted his adventures at Beach House at two o’clock that very morning. Mixed with his disconnected ravings were explosions of self-accusation where Eunice was concerned, and protests that no consideration on earth would induce him to reveal his identity or touch a penny of the accursed money left by David Storm.

Once he turned fiercely on the detective in a white fury.

“Have you played some rotten police trick?” he roared. “The letter was there. I saw it, touched it; I was alone in the room. No one but a ghost——”

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"I am not a ghost, Mr. Jessop," said Hunter, bending his thick neck in close scrutiny of the envelope. "Calm yourself, and let us go through the affair quietly. The letter is not in this room, apparently. If that is so, it never left Beach House. You did not open the envelope?"

"No. For Heaven's sake, believe what I am saying or I shall go crazy."

"Was it—just like this—an open end, with a paper visible inside?"

"Yes, yes. I would never dream of opening it, or reading it, once I was sure I had found what I sought."

"But this envelope has been closed, and steamed open. The gum used for sealing these envelopes will not stand double use. Once it has been dissolved and allowed to dry again it loses its properties. And, just look at this—you can see where the steam has driven the fine dust of years into the pores of the paper. Someone has opened this envelope, Mr. Jessop, and taken so long over the reading of the letter before replacing it, if it was replaced, that the flap would not fasten again."

Jessop forced himself to gaze, wild-eyed, at the marks discovered by the Inspector.

"But there *was* a paper there," he protested, in a very paroxysm of impotent wrath.

"Gently now," the fat man soothed him, "no use in boiling over. Once again, please. You took it from its hiding-place around the long screw. Now,

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rack your brains to think what you did with it. Did you put it straight into your pocket?"

"No. I laid it on a table. The candelabrum was difficult to refit, or my fingers were awkward. Anyhow, the envelope was there all the time, lying by my side. It was impossible for anyone to touch it without my knowledge in that silent house—impossible, I say."

"It was almost equally impossible for anyone to half-choke Mr. David Storm to death in that same house while you were lying wide-awake in the opposite room, Mr. Jessop," said the detective dryly. "Now, if only you will help——"

"Help!" raved the other. "What can I do? I risked a good deal last night in going there at such an hour and in such conditions. Of course, I can try once more, but the fiend who has collared this letter will now be forewarned——"

"Time enough to discuss your next move, sir. What I want to know now is this—how were you—an utter stranger by your own account—a stranger so new to your surroundings that the first time you were there you did not realize whose roof you were under—how were you able to enter a many-roomed, old-fashioned house in the dead hours of the night, go up two flights of stairs, pass several rooms, enter one particular room, and pick out such an extraordinary hiding-place for a letter as the column of an ormolu ornament?"

Jessop, who was stumping up and down the car-

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pet in his bare feet, halted and laughed harshly as Hunter made an end.

“My good sir,” he said with angry emphasis, “in order to understand the why and wherefore of this business you would need to have had the exceeding bad fortune to be born a Storm. Every inch of that ill-fated house has been known to me by hearsay and sketching ever since I was able to comprehend ten consecutive words. My father was a monomaniac on that point. He drew, and explained, and drew again till I was weary of it. The one thing he never would tell me was its precise whereabouts. I fancied it must be located somewhere in Devonshire, and it was the interior, not the exterior, I was acquainted with. My grandfather must have built that room overlooking the sea of recent years. It did not exist during my father’s time. In fact, you will hardly ever find a really old house on the coast of England with its windows facing the sea. Our canny ancestors would have none of your fine vistas. They wanted warmth, and shelter from the prevalent winds.”

Hunter, as in Sheldon’s case, did not like being cornered so promptly in an argument.

“I would remind you of your own words, sir,” he said. “You called your notion that you might be under David Storm’s roof ‘a dim wondering.’ ‘How could you guess’ you said——”

Jessop’s scornful laugh again cut the big man short.

“I was taken there like a half-drowned rat,” he

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cried. "I was bruised and sore, and my eyes were red and salt. My first step, when I reached the corridor, was into a dining-room where was seated the most beautiful girl I have ever set eyes on. Has your mighty mind never wandered, Inspector, when you encountered a pretty girl unexpectedly?"

Hunter waved a large hand.

"I only wanted you to say that, Mr. Jessop," he explained. "You have done a good deal, far more than I hoped for when I entered this room, in the way of clearing up difficulties. Not that you have not suggested others. This case is amazing—now. At first, it looked like a very ordinary burglary, without even a thief's real object, for I always fancied that Miss Lowther's jewelry was stolen as a blind. And, by the way, what of *her* letter? Do you believe that the one you have lost would be a copy of hers?"

"I am sure of it. There are other copies in existence, too. I tell you, Inspector, we Storms are a mad lot. This hiding and copying is a disease in our blood. I don't think *I* have it. Perhaps my level-headed New England mother has taken the taint out of me. But that queer habit lies at the root of the whole affair. In any case, I may be making too much of the loss of this particular letter. Do me a favor, will you? Go to that young lady, Miss Lowther, and tell her that I shall not fail her. I meant to send her to-day the—the—information I promised her. Say it is not my fault that

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I have failed temporarily. It shall be done, if I live."

"Why not tell her yourself, sir?" asked Mr. Hunter blandly.

"Because I cannot. My reason matters to none save myself. Will you give her that message—in those precise words?"

"Yes," said the detective, deciding suddenly.

"Thank you. And now——"

"Now that I have spoiled your rest effectively, I must be off. Yes, sir, I am sorry, but duty must be done, and a policeman's lot is not a happy one, as the song says. I'll keep this envelope, if you'll allow me. Two more questions before I go. Do you intend to remain here for some days?"

"Until I have safeguarded Miss Lowther's rights as David Storm's heiress."

"But you——"

"I am the heir-at-law in the case of an intestacy—not if there is a will, and there are twenty wills, I have no doubt."

"Twenty wills!" Mr. Hunter hummed at this. "Well, as to my second question. If your father was Mr. David Storm's son——"

"My name is Storm, not Jessop. Yes. You are shrewd, Inspector—shrewd and quick. My mother's name is Jessop, and my father assumed it, having an abiding hatred for the name of Storm."

The heated sarcasm fell off Mr. Hunter's broad shoulders as thistledown off an elephant's hide.

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"May I, with my hand on the doorknob, so to speak, put one more query?" he said. "Have you seen much of a local policeman named Sheldon during these days since the affair at Beach House?"

"A clever-looking chap, with one eye smaller than the other?"

"That's he."

"Yes. He brought me a message from Miss Lowther. He struck me as a peculiar customer."

"Most peculiar," admitted Mr. Hunter, and he went out.

He strode ponderously to the local police-station, and sought the superintendent.

"Where's that man, Sheldon?" he asked.

"I thought he was acting under your orders," was the surprised answer. "He has been off regular duty during the past twenty-four hours in connection with the Beach House inquiry."

"Oh, ah, yes. That is so, of course. I meant where is he now?"

"Probably having a rest. He came in last evening in a great flutter, and said he would be up all night, he expected. Shall I give you his address?"

"Just the thing," said Mr. Hunter, making a note in his little book.

"Now," he said to himself when in the street again, "I shall look up Mr. Clever P.C. Sheldon. He is dark and deep, that young man. What's his little game? Thinks he can best the Yard, does he? Well, he isn't the first who has thought that. But

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they all come back to us at the end. First, though, I shall drop in on Miss Eunice Lowther. Nice girl, uncommonly nice girl! Jessop spoke of her as though she were a saint. Why the deuce won't he go to her himself? . . . Dash it, the weather is changing. I shall be a limp rag again in another hour."

But Detective Inspector Hunter was his own sun, for the wind was cold, and people were walking briskly through the narrow thoroughfares of Eskmouth. The fact was that he was thinking furiously, and the unusual exercise was reducing his weight.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEREIN PRIDE HAS A FALL

To understand the awakening of Inspector Hunter his past achievements should be appreciated. When young, he had the strength and physique of a bull, and his mind was shrewd, clear, well stored with the lore of the criminal classes. Not often was he called on to meet a really high order of intellect in his pursuit of a malefactor; even then, though defeated on minor issues, his sound common-sense usually led him to the right place, the ultimate reduction, though ingenuity and cleverness might have obscured every trail.

A most excellent digestion, aiding and abetting a fine appetite, helped to make his figure unwieldy with advancing years; he was prone to follow the easy way, and too ready to contend that the motive of crime was almost invariably sordid and mean. But he was an alert and dangerous man if roused, and when it was suddenly borne in on him that a young policeman, a country constable, a rawbones stationed in a tuppenny-hapenny spot like Eskmouth, had actually dared to humbug him and throw dust in his

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eyes, well—the big man of Scotland Yard burgeoned into a very Colossus of wrathful activity.

He realized, too, that Jessop's candor had given him an extraordinary advantage in the chase after some unknown scoundrel—an advantage, that is, over the man who had dared to flout him, and he was determined not to forego it. As it happened, the vicar of Eskmouth was a botanist and a member of the Alpine Club. Hunter had called on the reverend gentleman, and came away with a more intimate knowledge of the habitat of rare species of *Roccella tinctoria*, and a livelier sense of the difficulty of descending unknown rock faces. In a word, Sheldon had been "pulling his leg," and Inspector Hunter did not like it.

"Miss Lowther is out," said the elderly dame with whom Eunice had taken up her abode. "She looked that ill an' run down, pore thing, that I made her some beef tea, an' took care that she supped it, an' then I just packed her off to t' pier wi' t' dog."

Being a Londoner, those final clipped syllables might have puzzled Hunter were it not that "pier" and "dog" were eloquent of direction and purpose. He lifted his hat with a fine air, and strolled pierwards. Eunice was not there; but on the sands, far out at the lapping edge of a low tide, he saw a graceful, black-robed figure, and a white terrier capering about with loud enthusiasm.

Within five minutes he was confronting Eunice with his bland: "Good-morning, miss. Fine, breezy

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weather you have on this coast. I wonder at times why our rich London does not draw fresh air from the seaside and pump it into the streets. When you come to think of it, wholesome sea air is really more important than gas."

"As matters stand, Inspector, you Londoners unfortunately have to content yourselves with the gas," said Eunice.

He laughed, quite good-humoredly.

"I am glad I drew you out, Miss Lowther," he wheezed. "A big fellow like me offers an easy target, but that shaft would have spitted even the smallest cockney. Well, then, let me reach safer ground in complimenting you. Not many young ladies could have gone through your experiences of the past few days and kept your wit so keen."

"My landlady told me a little while ago that I looked peeky, whatever that may mean," said she, smiling.

"Oh, that is nothing. Late hours and running about wet in a dismal wood can account for pale cheeks."

The smile faded from her face, but a rush of color came.

"Do the police keep a *dossier* of my movements, then?" she asked.

Hunter spoke a little French, and knew quite well what a *dossier* meant, for he was a confirmed anti-Dreyfusite.

"No," he said. "The police have nothing but

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sympathy for you. I happen to know of your adventures in Rindscarp Gill—because Mr. Jessop told me of them.”

“Mr. Jessop!”

Her voice was raised to a pitch of excitement, so much so that Jock, who had hitherto regarded the big man as a friendly interloper, growled a little, and the fur along his spine rose in a dark ridge.

“Yes. I am betraying no confidence. In fact, he has sent me to you with a message. He said that although he has failed thus far to keep his promise he will not fail you in the end. Just that—in effect, you must not lose faith in him.”

“He—sent you! Where is he now—in Eskmouth?”

“Yes, in the Rose and Crown Hotel. I have a sort of notion, as the Yankees say, that he means to remain there until he has done what he promised—about the will.”

Now, although some sections of the British public profess their disbelief in police evidence when what is known as a “cooked” case is brought before a bench of magistrates, there is an ingrained feeling in the heart of every good citizen that a policeman can be trusted. If an ordinary constable says a thing he is credited implicitly, but if the informant be an inspector or superintendent—especially if he wears the mantle of Scotland Yard—he is regarded as an oracle, and with much more real ground for confidence than the Delphic one.

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So Eunice found it impossible to doubt, and a hundred questions crowded in her brain.

"Mr. Jessop seems to have favored you far more than me, Mr. Hunter," she said. "May I ask if he discussed my affairs readily?"

"No, I can't say that," and the heavy lips pursed sagely. "No, he isn't what you might call a communicative young man—in some respects—though remarkably candid in others. But I am hardly at liberty to tell you much more, since his candor does not bear on you, Miss Lowther—in a sense, that is, because I suppose if one looked at things from a general point of view, everything that refers to the mystery there"—and he nodded his head in the direction of Beach House, hidden now by the Esk-mouth stone pier—"must be of interest to you."

"But I was under the impression that you were convinced of Mr. Jessop's responsibility for my uncle's death, Mr. Hunter," said Eunice, looking up at him with fearless eyes.

"Were you now? Really? And why should you think that?"

"Because you said so, in the library at Beach House."

"Maybe I did. One sometimes talks carelessly. Sheldon told you, I suppose?"

"You must suppose nothing of the kind," said Eunice warmly, for Sheldon's fear of discovery by his superiors in another matter promptly occurred to her.

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“Yet he and I were alone there, Miss Lowther.”

“You were not. I was seated behind a curtain in the oriel window when you came in. At first I did not listen, but, later, I could not help myself.”

“Oh, that is where I erred, was it? Ah, well, one makes many mistakes. But my blunder was a small matter compared with Sheldon’s. You see, he is an official. He ought to be trustworthy, yet I find he is keeping things to himself. I am quite sure that both you or Jackson, or the old cook, Mrs. Jackson, must have let him know that Mr. David Storm pointed at Mr. Jessop in his dying moments, but not a word has he said to me about it. Surely you told him, or one of you, that night, in the stress of your feelings? Oh, come, now, Miss Lowther, what have I done that you should regard *me* with such suspicion?”

For even the keen-eyed detective had failed utterly to comprehend the look of hopeless misery that clouded Eunice’s face as she heard those words. If the police made so light of her uncle’s apparent singling out of Jessop as his assailant, to what good end, then, had she sold herself to Robert Storm? Little could she guess that the artist, in a sentence, had not only supplied the key to the riddle which was torturing her—since her intuition said that David Storm did not point to him as a murderer—but had also blown away the cobweb of Robert Storm’s pretense that he was in a position to supply

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a motive for the commission of the crime by Jessop. That which seemed dark and vague to Eunice was perfectly clear to the detective. Half-a-dozen words of Jessop's had given the only plausible explanation of the old man's action; unhappily, those words were not spoken to Eunice, and Hunter was under a bond of professional secrecy not to reveal Jessop's identity.

"Don't you see," went on the detective, more and more perplexed by the distress and terror in the girl's blanched features, "that all this muddle calls for openness in those who have nothing to fear? Mr. Jessop, although he has behaved like a fool in some ways, is plain-spoken enough when it comes to close quarters. Now, there are some rocks over there where our voices won't be drowned by this constant roar of the waves. Will you come there with me, and sit down? I want you to tell me everything you know about the Storms and their family history. Such things help wonderfully at times. You would be surprised how often you find a grandson acting like his grandfather—or a nephew taking after his uncle."

The saving clause was put in hurriedly, for Inspector Hunter thought he was sailing rather near the wind of his promise to Jessop. But he had no reason to dread the girl's divination in that hour. She was too miserable, too castdown by the sadness of her discovery. She had given so much, with so little return. Robert Storm could not harm Jessop. Apparently, he might shout his knowledge from the

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house-tops, and no one be a penny the worse. Yet she was plighted to him as a wife, just to buy his silence!

It took Hunter a good hour to worm out of her the true cause of her despair. At last, encouraged by the genuine kindness of the man, and rebelling in agony against the tie so cruelly imposed on her, she told of her consciousness of Jessop's innocence, of Storm's truculent behavior, and of the pledge he had wrung from her.

Hunter would have made light of it, but Eunice did not accept his consolation in that spirit.

"No," she sobbed, "I promised, promised before God. I cannot break such a vow. I would feel myself forever condemned and cast off. Oh, it was rash and stupid, but better be any of these things than wicked and foresworn."

"I shall be greatly mistaken if Mr. Robert Storm does not have something other than matrimony to occupy his mind before long," growled Hunter, for once stirred from his official phlegm by sight of the girl's suffering.

At once she sprang up from the rock where she had been sitting, with Jock at her feet.

"Do you mean to imply that he was in some manner accountable for my uncle's death?" she cried wildly.

The detective was then really taken aback. By no remote chance had the thought suggested itself to his well-ordered official mind that the girl might

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never have suspected Storm of a share, to say the least, in the double crime committed at Beach House.

"I imply nothing, Miss Lowther," he hastened to say. "My duty leads me to prosecute all kinds of inquiries in every sort of quarter. At present I only mean to tell you that circumstances may arise within a few hours, a few days, a month, which will render your marriage with Robert Storm an absolute impossibility."

And at that very moment, Police Constable Sheldon was reading the words "those who have defrauded you, after enjoying the sweets of possession . . . and reveling in the joy of hurting her whom I love, will find gall in their wine, and, if there is knowledge in the grave, their gall will cause my cold eyes to glow!"

Moreover, Robert Storm knew that Sheldon was reading them, and was beating his head with clenched fists in the impotence that had fallen upon him; how could he hope for silence and opportunity now that the police held David Storm's secret in their hands?

At last, feeling strangely comforted in the midst of her desolation, Eunice shook hands with Hunter, who stooped laboriously to pat Jock, and was graciously allowed to achieve his purpose, since every self-respecting fox-terrier knows that when his mistress sits on a seashore rock in deep talk with a man for a whole hour, that man is a person to be looked on with a kindly eye.

Hence, it was a primed and wary detective-

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inspector who knocked at the door of a certain cottage in the town, and met his man with his "Hello, Sheldon," nor was he blind to Sheldon's manifest reluctance to admit him, nor to the green stains, not thoroughly brushed off, on Sheldon's uniform, nor to the lichen-stuffed crevices between upper and sole in the toes of Sheldon's boots.

In answer to the young constable's question, "Did you want me, sir?" Hunter said agreeably:

"Yes. We ought to go through some points in this Beach House affair together. I've been strolling about all the morning, and feel a bit tired. May I come in and sit down?"

Sheldon did not budge.

"It is my landlady's washing day," he said. "The house reeks of soap-suds. I am sure, sir, you will be better pleased if we stroll to the police-station—it is not far—and there we can have the charge-room to ourselves at this hour."

He was not sure of himself this morning. He ought to have admitted Hunter at once. The big man leaned playfully against him, as an elephant might lean against a willow.

"Not a yard, my dear fellow," he gasped. "I'm dead beat. Phew! it's getting hot again. I would lie down in soap-suds rather than walk anywhere for the next half-hour."

But he was dealing with an adroit brain. Sheldon had not risked limb and life, to say nothing of his career in the police force, to be bowled out now by

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the unfortunate hazard that had brought Hunter to his lodgings at the very instant the precious letter was spread out on the table of his sitting-room.

That room was on the right of the narrow entrance, which, in the style of most old-time cottages that were not mere hovels, led straight through to the back door. The opposite front room was tenanted by a junior mistress in the girls' board school, and she, of course, was out during the morning hours.

"Very well, sir," he said, yielding with good grace, but a few seconds too late. "It's a small crib, but——" and he threw open the door on the left—"comfortable enough."

"Odd thing," said Hunter, crowding in through the doorway. "There's a smell of scent here, rather like lavender in a linen cupboard, while from the room across the passage I thought I got a whiff of tobacco. Devil a sniff of soap anywhere, though."

"Would you like to smoke, sir?" asked Sheldon civilly.

"Don't mind. But, dash it all, my young sprig, do you run a ladies' sewing-class here in your off time?"

Hunter was looking, with those big, prominent eyes of his, at a neat collection of girls' pinafores, all folded and ticketed, stacked on a window seat. The tickets were painfully legible: "Jane Marsh, 1st Prize;" "Winifred Higginson, 2d Prize;" "Elizabeth Roberts, Commended," and so on.

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"I see you hem your own handkerchiefs, too," continued Hunter mercilessly, for a sewing-machine stood on the table, and a piece of cambric still reposed in it, showing that some industrious fingers had been disturbed in housewifely occupation.

"Just a moment, sir," said Sheldon, and he was gone. Hunter made after him, but the rooms of the cottage were so very small that he could not turn quickly enough. Before he was in the passage Sheldon had grabbed up the thin slips of note-paper from the table of his own room and crammed them into his trousers' pocket. Then he laughed.

"The fact is, sir, I hardly thought my own crib decent enough to receive you in, but I did not know that Miss Walker's room was so littered up, so I brought you in there. Really, my place is almost as tidy."

"Another score for you, Sheldon," thought the Inspector, but his bland face only creased in a smile as he said, on entering:

"This smells of man. I feel more at home here. Now, which of these chairs is the soundest one? I weigh a lot—seventeen stun—so I have to be careful. I felt quite at ease half-an-hour ago, since I was sitting on a rock, talking to Miss Eunice Lowther. You, by the way, look as if you had been climbing rocks instead of sitting on them."

"I have," said Sheldon, well aware that Harris could give details of nearly the whole duel between Storm and himself.

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“ Oh, indeed—whereabouts? Beach House? ”

“ Yes, sir. You remember our discussion about rock-climbing? ”

“ Perfectly. By the way, you were right in that matter, and I was wrong; same about the lichen. But you were saying——”

Sheldon told of his morning's adventure, modestly, but with a real appreciation of his triumph and difficulties. Hunter listened in silence. When he spoke, he asked one of the questions that Sheldon was waiting for, though, oddly enough, it came somewhat out of the order in which he fancied they would be put.

“ How did you know that Storm would be inclined to believe you when you told him there was a letter hidden in the leg of the table? ”

“ Because I put it there, and he had lost one. ”

“ Ah, you knew that, too? ”

“ Yes, sir. I made it my business to be in Beach House at two o'clock this morning, and I saw the artist, Douglas Jessop, climb in, and find this letter in a candlestick. I saw Robert Storm steal it from him, and replace the empty envelope on the table——”

“ Oh, for goodness' sake! ” protested the other, “ be more explicit. ‘ Steal,’ ‘ replace,’ what do these words mean? ”

Thus pulled up, Sheldon again gave the fullest details, which Hunter followed with professional relish.

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“Good,” cried the detective, when the younger man had finished. “Storm took the orange and left Jessop the rind, while the man who had a real suck at the pulp was yourself. Now, where is the letter that all this fuss was about?”

Sheldon took from the tail pocket of his coat a number of dummy sheets similar to those which Harris had thrown down first. Hunter’s unforeseen presence had driven him to take this desperate step. At first, he flinched from it, even in his most secret thought, but the prospect of winning Eunice whilst she was poor, and proving himself the magician that should make her rich again, had so wrought on his soul and brain that he was now strung up to frenzy and folly.

“There!” he said, pitching the crumpled package on the table.

The detective picked it up, smoothed out the sheets, and permitted himself to be very greatly surprised.

“But they are blank,” he said, with the widespread palms of amazement.

Sheldon laughed, almost hysterically.

“Not worth all the fuss and bother, were they?” he cried with a voice that was on the verge of cracking. “Another of old David Storm’s dodges. Don’t you remember, sir, that the paper Storm found and showed to the lawyer and the land-agent, and to Miss Eunice herself, was practically blank. It had the words, ‘Try again, Richard’; that is all.”

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“So it was,” said Mr. Hunter. “Queer old bird. ‘Try again, Richard!’ But that was something. Here is nothing—unless the fire test or the acid test brings revelations. Yet I rather imagine they will fail.” He held the paper, sheet by sheet, up to the light. “Yes, I’m pretty certain that these will yield no treasure. In fact, they strike me as distinctly modern. Might have been bought in an Eskmouth shop yesterday.”

Sheldon was pale now, but master of himself.

“Perhaps they were,” he said.

“But how is that possible? Why should Jessop and Storm, who hate each other mortally, all on account of that girl, play at this child’s game of hiding blank paper?”

“It may be that each hopes the other will commit himself in some way during the search for the real thing.”

“What real thing?”

“The letter Mr. David Storm left for Miss Eunice, and which the lawyer believes contained directions for the finding of his will.”

“How should Jessop, a stranger artist, know anything about that?”

“He may have hidden it, sir, when he was in the house that night.”

“But why, man? Give us a hint of a motive.”

“Well, suppose he was in love with Miss Lowther—and wanted to make sure of her—what better way than to keep in his own hand the means of restoring

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her to the estate she will lose if Robert Storm becomes the heir? ”

“ Ah, that’s ingenious—that’s the best thing you’ve said yet. It rings true, but it comes from a false mind, a damnable, perverted mind. Still, it is feasible. Now, these sheets were in an envelope, and the envelope was wrapped tightly round the screw of a candelabrum, so the note-paper would bear the impress of the wrapping? ”

It was Sheldon now who was perspiring freely, and Mr. Hunter had apparently little to complain of in that regard.

“ Yes—I—I would only point out, sir, that they have been squeezed in many different shapes since they were taken out of their hiding-place in that upper room.”

“ But they are thin and brittle; no, not brittle, but tough and crackly. Anyhow, let us try.”

To Sheldon’s profound bewilderment and alarm, the detective whipped out of a pocket the creased and wrinkled envelope given him by Jessop.

“ Here is the cover,” he said joyfully. “ Let us see if it fits the dummy inside! ”

Sheldon, all clammy and creepy, for he had burned his boats in concealing the letter, looked on like one in a dream while Hunter tried to manipulate the new paper to lodge in the old envelope. His fingers were strangely deft, but by no manner of means could he find folds that accommodated them-

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selves to the long, narrow, rumpled cover. The difference, too, between the faded, rust-stained envelope and its presumed contents was most marked in the strong light of a summer's day.

At last, the detective abandoned the task and turned to Sheldon with a grin.

"No go!" he said. "The youngest junior on circuit would bowl me over if I tried to make a point with that sort of evidence. You're a kid at our game yet, Sheldon, but let me give you a tip—never try to foist off a silly theory like that on the counsel for the defense. He would riddle you, make you a perfect sieve, and the jury would not believe a word you said afterwards, even though you took your facts from the Nautical Almanac."

The unhappy constable felt that he must say something.

"Sir," he gasped, "that envelope: it looks like the one I saw. But how did it come into your hands?"

"Mr. Jessop gave it to me."

"Mr. Jessop—gave it."

"This morning. You see, I tell you everything. Of course, in a matter like this, where an important property is at stake, to say nothing of a criminal almost in the law's net, it is essential that those working on the inquiry should be above-board and thorough with each other. Now, I suppose that in your flurry you have not dived into the wrong pocket? You and Harris arranged your tragi-

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comedy with two packages, you know. What of the other?"

Sheldon managed to answer quickly:

"It is lying there in the cleft, just as it fell. I had no time to rescue it. Storm would have flung me down headlong if once his hand had grasped my ankle."

"You are quite sure?" and Hunter's voice had suddenly become cold and grave, for he was beginning to sense the intoxication of Eunice's presence on the men who came in contact with her.

"Of course I am," said Sheldon stubbornly, for here, at least, he was on firm ground, and Harris would bear him out.

"Then you can report yourself to the superintendent for ordinary duty. In future I take sole charge of the investigation."

"That is hardly fair," said the younger man, white-faced and desperate. "When all is said and done, I, and I alone, have laid bare every clew."

Mr. Hunter did not lose his temper.

"You just sit down and think over what I have said," he cried cheerfully. "Perhaps, if you come to me with a reasonably good notion later, I may ask for your help again. At present, my mind is made up. Here, these are of no use to me."

He threw the blank sheets on the table, pocketed the envelope, and went out without another word.

Then Sheldon sat, and thought.

CHAPTER XIV

SOME ALLIES—AND OTHERS

DURING three long days that House of Silence on Black Nab point effectually shielded from the outer world its secrets and its heart-pangs. It was the nerve center of many emotions, but never a sign came from it of the stress that was wearing the lives of four strong men and one woman, whom the whirligig of events had suddenly thrown into a Black Hole of hate, and doubt, and love.

The one who dwelt there, Robert Storm, never moved out during daylight. He had summarily dismissed and paid off all the old servants, including even Wilkins, the gamekeeper, who occupied a cottage on the moors nearly two miles away. From Hargen Hall he brought an old woman, once his nurse, to cook his meals and perform the simpler household duties of which she was capable; for the rest, he lived in complete isolation, smoking, thinking, planning.

Of course, Mr. Rooper tried to interpose legal bars to his actions, but the solicitor was almost helpless. Eunice had given up possession, which is nine points of the law, and the tenth rested now on

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the apparently slight chance of finding the will and thus frustrating the proceedings in intestacy which Storm's legal representatives were pushing vigorously. He knew the dead man's intentions with regard to Eunice's immediate future, but the seal put on his lips was absolute, and he could only wait until that curious time-limit expired, when, in view of his old friend's peculiar habit of mind, other developments might be expected.

He had in hand, at that time, a sum of £1,000, which, at the expiry of two months from David Storm's death, was to be given to Eunice at the rate of £100 per month. He had also a further sum of £500, ear-marked "for legal costs, if necessary, but only to be trenched on after the lapse of six months, and subject to conditions which will then become known." Finally, he had a closed letter to a London Bank, indorsed "To be posted six months after my death, D. S."

The lawyer, therefore, had every reason to look for some excitement in the near future; meanwhile, he amused himself by annoying and thwarting Robert Storm's solicitors as far as he was able, which was not very much.

On that first day, after Sheldon had fooled him so successfully in the matter of the letter, Storm sat in a stupor in the room overlooking the sea. He had found the three wills described by his uncle, for it was into his clutches that Eunice's carefully cherished letter had fallen. But he had destroyed only

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one of them, the version carved in stone on the face of the rock, or rather, in a crevice or pocket which was preserved from the action of the weather.

And his reasons for destroying one, while he kept not only the letter itself, but the manuscript will hidden in the candelabrum, and the will scratched in the quicksilver on the back of an old looking-glass, were fully as subtle and forceful as the man's nature might lead a student of psychology to expect.

No efforts of his would prevail on the bank to part with its documents, and, without actual directions, he was sure that he would never be able to discover the nine remaining wills secreted in the house. Even if Rooper died, or his safe was burgled or burnt, that sly old fox, Storm, must have taken every precaution that his wishes should become known as soon as the six months' interval had elapsed.

So it came to this—Eunice must be won and wed long before the six months were sped, and, as a trump card to force her hand, how magnanimous it would be if he produced the letter and the two wills he had secured! The third, that in stone, could not be removed from prying eyes, so he defaced it by prising the rock loose with a crowbar and smearing moss thickly over the débris. This dodge had proved his undoing, since it was some of that very refuse with which Sheldon had blinded him when another second would have seen the policeman hurtling to his doom.

Not a jot had Robert Storm cared for the pres-

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ence of the gaping Harris. It would be impossible for any jury to convict him of willful murder, while, if any were breaking the law, it was the two policemen themselves.

Yet the immediate cause of his present collapse was his own astuteness in removing the only will that could by any remote chance be seen and read by others than himself during that period of six months. That fact seared the gaping wound of his self-love as hot iron sears raw flesh. He writhed and cursed every time he thought of it.

Then, again, he had recognized Jessop the instant he looked carefully at him in the Rose and Crown Hotel. When the artist was dragged ashore, fainting, pallid, and bedraggled, the likeness to his father passed unnoticed; but in the hotel, when he was in evening dress, and his face wore that stern and haughty aspect which was not his habitual expression, he became the reincarnation of the man driven by lies from Beach House so many years ago.

Moreover, Jessop's behavior subsequent to the unforeseen death of David Storm argued that he was not unaware of his parentage, and was ready to maintain the family feud. At that thought, Storm did, indeed, chuckle morosely. How smart he had been in telling the artist that Eunice was his cousin! That was a rare stroke!

It would have proved another masterpiece of art if the letter could be produced at the right moment. Jessop, evidently, meant to make no claim on the

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estate. Perhaps the fool meant to show his disinterestedness by leaving the girl in possession. Well, he, Storm, could be disinterested, too, but to suit his own purposes. When all was said and done, Eunice was an outsider, a waif adopted by David Storm in a mixed spirit of charity and spite.

And now the whole first-rate scheme was marred by this interfering policeman, a country lout whom one would have credited with less brains than an egg! Storm realized that his own bravado was to blame. Why had he taken such pains to replace the manuscript will by the letter in the candelabrum? At the time he chose the hiding-place as the easiest and most dramatic for disclosure if ever it became necessary to use it in Eunice's presence. He meant to adapt the second candelabrum for holding the will itself, and there would be no great difficulty in getting the girl to accept the plausible theory that the letter was really a copy of that left in her care. To this end, he had burnt the envelope stolen from her room, and had put the letter inside the cover used for the will.

Jessop's action in placing the packet on a table while he reconstructed the candelabrum, and thus giving Storm an opportunity to secure its all-important contents, had certainly saved the former from being shot. There was every excuse. He was behaving like a burglar in the dead of night. Storm fancied, then, that he had showed exemplary self-control, though his motive was no higher one than

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a desire to avoid a fresh torrent of publicity and police prying. Moreover, Jessop's death at his hands would absolve Eunice from her promise. How he squirmed and cursed himself for his weakness in not having removed one viper from his path when the chance served. Never mind the girl; she would come to heel when he commanded! He ought to have fired, and aimed not to maim but to kill.

And yet again came the vision of that pestiferous brute, Sheldon! How did *he* know of the letter? Could he have been in the house during the previous night? Was it his hand which had enacted the part of the vengeful ghost of David Storm and taken the letter from Storm's own room? At this notion, ever recurring and growing stronger, Robert Storm would rave in language that must have caused those peaceful old walls to shudder.

But the day passed, and a night of open-eyed torture, and a long morning marched to noon, yet never a sign came from the police. What could it mean? By all the gods, was Sheldon waiting to be bribed?

In a fury of haste, Storm telephoned to the police-station when this fantasy swooped down on him.

"Is Constable Sheldon there? It is Mr. Robert Storm of Beach House who is inquiring."

"No, sir," came a voice. "He is on duty."

"Tell him to ring me up when he comes in."

About six o'clock the silence of Beach House was jarred by the bell, and Storm was at the receiver in a few strides.

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“That you, Mr. Storm?” came Sheldon’s voice.

“Yes. I want to see you. Come here immediately.”

“Sorry, sir, I can’t.”

“You can’t? Why not?”

“I have been ordered to drop the Beach House affair, and it would be an act of insubordination if I visited the place now.”

“D—n your hair-splitting. Come here at once.”

“Really, sir, it is impossible.”

“Then, where do you live? I will come to you.”

After some hesitation, Sheldon gave his address, and named nine o’clock as an hour he would be free.

On the stroke of nine Storm was at the door. Both men, before the door was closed, glanced up and down the quiet street, and neither of them ever knew that Wilkins, dismissed gamekeeper, strong partisan of Eunice, and bitter hater of Robert Storm, was peeping through a hedge at their meeting, Hunter having hired him as an unofficial scout. For one thing, the man was acquainted with the figure and name of every man, woman, and child resident in Eskmouth; for another, he was accustomed to watching poachers, and could make himself small, slink like a fox, peer like a hawk.

Storm lost no time in coming to the point.

“Are we alone here?” he asked, fixing his red eyes on Sheldon’s somewhat pale face.

“Yes, sir, I think so.”

“Are you not quite sure?”

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“ Well, there is no one here except the old woman who owns the cottage. The school-mistress who occupies the other set of rooms is attending a choir practice.”

“ Very well, then. What is your price for that letter? ”

“ Price, sir? ”

“ Yes. Give it to me now, and I hand you fifty pounds in notes.”

“ It can't be done, sir.”

“ I also give you an open check for another hundred pounds. You need not fear that I will stop payment of the check.”

“ It is impossible, sir. I hardly know what you are talking about.”

“ Don't be an ass, man—the letter which nearly cost you your life yesterday.”

“ Oh, that? That silly joke nearly cost me my job, too. I was within an ace of being dismissed for exceeding my duty. The letter you saw was only a dummy.”

“ You are lying. Don't make me desperate, you fool. Fifty pounds down and a check for two hundred. There, that will give you a fine start in any Colony, and you will do better there than in a God-forsaken hole like Eskmouth.”

“ You've got to believe me, Mr. Storm. I haven't any letter—nothing but a few blank sheets of paper.”

“ But I saw it.”

“ You thought you did, sir.”

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“Confound you, if there was no real letter why did you lead me such a dance up the rock?”

“Just to test a theory of mine, sir. I fancied you would be interested in the letter stolen from Miss Eunice Lowther, so I tried a little scheme of my own on you, and I was right, but my superiors were so annoyed that I was severely reprimanded and taken off the case.”

“Annoyed, were they? Their annoyance is nothing to mine. Why do you try and hoodwink me, Sheldon? You don’t carry guns enough. Come, now, produce it.”

He suddenly whipped out a parcel of bank-notes, with such a ferocious gesture that Sheldon started, thinking he was about to look into the barrel of a revolver. Storm laughed, and began to count:

“One, two, three, four——”

“You need not take that trouble, Mr. Storm,” said Sheldon, recovering himself. “I have no letter. I cannot even imagine what the contents of such a letter would be, unless, as Mr. Rooper believes, it would tell Miss Lowther where to find a will. At any rate, I cannot give you what I do not possess, nor can I interfere any more in the Beach House inquiry, because it now rests entirely in the hands of the gentleman from Scotland Yard.”

Storm’s brows grew dark with rage, and his massive forehead seamed in thick weals.

“Once and for all,” he cried—“four hundred pounds, I make it. Not a penny more! Confound

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you, if you've read the letter, which I suppose you have done, you must know that I cannot grab the Beach House estate, even if I would. I only want to marry Miss Lowther."

At those words, which seemed to sting Sheldon as though a hornet had pierced him, the policeman banged his hand on the little table.

"You might make it four thousand, Mr. Storm," he almost shouted, "and with no better result. I have not got the letter you want. I merely tricked you, with no slight success it would appear, and now I must ask you to leave my house and try to buy off your rivals elsewhere."

"My rivals elsewhere," repeated Storm, choking with disappointment.

"Yes, that artist fellow, Mr. Jessop. He is the favored one, I hear. I am told Miss Lowther would do anything for his sake."

"Who tells you these fairy-tales?"

"Maybe, I am guessing again, and coming as near the mark as I did with you when I made you climb the nab."

"And why should you be so anxious to make me into a climber? I might have blundered, you know, and pulled you down."

"You tried it, but failed. Still, you can climb well, Mr. Storm, and whoever killed your uncle— Well, that is no business of mine, now. I have to keep nursemaids' perambulators off the footpaths, and cuff small boys who play ball in the streets."

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“You idiot, give me that letter, and go away to a country where you can make a fortune.”

“You are wasting time, sir, and worrying me to no purpose. I must be going out, too. I am on duty from ten till one in the morning.”

Baffled, defeated, but far more surprised than cast-down, Storm flung out of the cottage and strode away rapidly in the direction of Beach House, which he did not care to leave practically untenanted for any long space of time.

He was sure Sheldon had the letter, but he was now equally sure that it would not be produced forthwith. He was given breathing-time. His next move must be with Eunice. If only he could force her to marry him at once! Stopping at a bookseller's, open late because evening newspapers were sold there, he bought a copy of Whitaker's Almanac. He wanted to read the regulations that governed marriages in the British Isles. Could he arrange for a wedding within a few hours? He must take the necessary measures at once, and, with the license in his pocket, compel the girl to fall in with his wishes.

Wilkins dogged his every movement. Before half-past ten that night Mr. Hunter knew of the meeting, and of the purchase of the book, and of the kind of book bought.

A friendship, an intimacy, which had sprung up in the meantime between Jessop and Inspector Hunter followed queer lines.

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They met frequently, and the detective quickly discovered everything he wished to know about the young artist's past. In response to his appeal, Jessop promised to forego for the present any further effort at house-breaking in search of a will in Eunice's favor. He was adamant in his refusal to assert his own rights, but he yielded to Hunter's urgency in the matter of allowing things to follow their own course for a week or so. Hunter expected that the next move would come from Storm, but he kept a contemplative eye on Sheldon, now engaged in the prosaic duties of patrolling the sea-front and tortuous lanes of Eskmouth.

In fact, Mr. Hunter's chief mission in life just then appeared to be the least likely one for which he was fitted by nature—he was playing the rôle of Cupid as between Jessop and Eunice, while the old-time streets that separated Eunice's cottage from the Rose and Crown Hotel supplied an equally incongruous substitute for the groves of Cyprus.

Thus, Jessop would ask casually how Miss Lowther was bearing the affliction and loss that had befallen her, and would assure Hunter of his deep concern in that lady's behalf. The message lost nothing in the telling the next time the detective encountered the girl. She, on her part, would timidly request him to convey to Mr. Jessop her thanks for his kind thoughts and interest.

On the day following Storm's visit to Sheldon two events happened, each of which was fated, in

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its own minor way, to forge a link in the chain of tragedy that was drawing tighter round Beach House.

The detective met Sheldon in a quiet street: the young policeman saluted and said:

“May I have a word with you, sir?”

“Twenty if you like,” said the big man pleasantly.

“Mr. Storm came to see me last night. He offered me four hundred pounds if I returned to him the letter which he fancied I had taken from Beach House.”

“Ah—fancied!”

“Yes, sir, that is the word. I could not shake his belief. Now, as you know, I have no letter—no written letter, that is——”

Mr. Hunter threw out his huge hands. Now that he was heart and soul in the chase he did not snatch at the vain-glory of telling Sheldon his news was stale.

“As I know?” he repeated. “I only know what *you* told me, Sheldon.”

The other stiffened, but his tone remained quite respectful.

“May I make a suggestion, sir?”

“Fire away.”

“It might carry things a stage farther—I am speaking in ignorance of what you may have discovered recently—if Miss Lowther saw that envelope Mr. Jessop gave you, and she said positively

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whether it was or was not the same as the envelope stolen from her room."

Hunter's big eyes dwelt on him contemplatively.

"If you had not meddled without consulting me, Sheldon, I should have been glad of your help in this matter," he said. "As it is, I don't mind telling you that Miss Lowther has seen the envelope: she says it is not the one her uncle intrusted to her care."

A sickly smile crept over Sheldon's face. He was miserable and heart-sick, torn between ambition and passion, for, to his credit be it said, the material gain of Eunice's wealth did not weigh greatly with him, since he had adopted the definite theory that Douglas Jessop must be David Storm's unknown grandson, and, if the girl made a *mésalliance*, she might lose the estate.

"I thought so," he said. "It was a put-up job. A will—*the* will—was in that envelope, and Storm replaced it with a dummy."

"P'raps," said Hunter, and he lumbered off.

"A will—*the* will," he murmured to himself. "Funny sort of slip—that. Is there more than one will? Jessop spoke of twenty. Why should a man say 'a will' when his mind is fixed on the idea of '*the* will'? That is the first real blunder Sheldon has committed. It means much."

Sheldon contrived to meet Eunice almost as often as Inspector Hunter. He could not say a great deal, of course. He forced himself to await the out-

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come of Robert Storm's planning. That dark and fiery volcano must burst forth soon again, he was certain—then his own opportunity might come. Until some opening offered itself he was perforce content with Eunice's friendly nod or sweet-voiced inquiry as to his welfare.

The second material occurrence was a piece of intelligence drawn by Jackson out of a half-fuddled groom of Storm's, enjoying a night out in the town.

The two men met in a bar, and it would have been a miracle if their talk had not turned on the singular histories of Hargen Hall and Beach House during the past few days.

"Rum thing, isn't it," said the groom, "that my guv'nor should come to be the owner of old David's property, after all?"

"It 'ud be a rummer thing if he remains the owner," said the vindictive Jackson.

"Don't see wot's goin' to stop 'im now. He's a queer pup, hard and crool, but he pays well if one does one's work. He kep' me hangin' round till nigh on four o'clock one mornin', the very day the old fellow hopped it, an' gev' me a sovereign for waitin', he did."

Jackson had the presence of mind to swallow his beer quietly.

"Where did you wait?" he asked, after a pause.

"Away over at Dixon's farm."

The answer was a surprising one. Dixon's farm

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lay a mile to the north of Eskmouth, and three miles from the Black Nab, and Jackson, keen to connect Storm with his master's death, since he had come to believe that two strangers, and not one only in the person of Jessop, had been in Beach House on the night of the crime, saw instantly that Storm had a valuable witness in the groom if needful.

But he reported the man's statement to Hunter, who thanked him, and said it was very important. He told Sheldon, too, when he came across him. Sheldon only smiled, and said: "It's just as well we should know that the man who collared the property was far away at the time of the murder."

Jackson scratched his Yorkshire head. His mind was wrapped up in mechanics, though for the present he had taken a job in a livery stable: nevertheless, he had a good memory.

"Don't you remember you thought you saw a boat sailin' out over the reef that night, Mr. Sheldon?" he inquired.

"So I did. Pure fancy, though."

"But if a man *had* got into a boat, and shoved her along quick, he could have got to Dixon's——"

"Oh, be off!" said Sheldon, laughing. "Don't you start building up theories on my chance words, or you'll find yourself in difficulties. Robert Storm is a dangerous man, Jackson. If he heard you were saying such things he'd have a warrant out for you on a charge of defamation of character."

"Anyway, I owe him a punch in the jaw, an' I'll

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give him that, warrant or no warrant," growled Jackson.

"What has he done to you?"

Deeming Sheldon a friend and well-wisher of his young mistress, Jackson told all he knew of the wild goings-on in Rindscarp Gill. Sheldon listened, all one bitter ache of jealousy and rage. Though he had taunted Storm with Jessop's rivalry he did not really mean it. Now, the discovery that it might be true came to him with the taste of poison. When he reached the privacy of his little cottage, he threw his arms on the table and hid his face in them. He had held Jessop as of small account where Eunice was concerned, thinking, in his moments of cold reasoning, that she was interested in the artist merely because she had rescued him.

In this hour of wretchedness he knew better. There was another and more formidable Richmond in the field than Storm. Had he sinned to no purpose? Had he lost caste even in his present humble profession for the sake of an idle dream? Hunter suspected him, he was sure. And now this popinjay, Jessop, stood in his way. Why, oh why, had not Storm shot him when he had the chance?

CHAPTER XV

EUNICE ACTS

JESSOP was sending one of his messages to Eunice by way of Mr. Hunter, when the representative of Scotland Yard suddenly brought about a crisis.

"It is beyond me to guess, Mr. Jessop," he said, "why a young man like you should have such an unconquerable dislike for a nice young woman like Miss Lowther."

"Dislike!" growled the artist, whose enforced seclusion was telling on his nerves, for he had not stirred outside the doors of the hotel since his raid on Beach House, "why do you assume that I dislike Miss Lowther? From what I have seen of you, Inspector, I regard you as a man who conceals an uncommonly sharp judgment under a take-things-easily attitude. But you are horribly wrong if you think that I harbor any other sentiment than a profound respect for that lady."

"Profound fiddlesticks!" said Hunter.

Jessop gave the big man a stare of indignation, but the other happened to be gazing placidly out of a window of Jessop's sitting-room in the Rose and Crown. He seemed to be much more interested in

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a fleet of fishing-boats just putting out to sea than in his newly-made friend's angry gesture.

"Silly expressions, such as 'fiddlesticks,' mean nothing," said Jessop angrily.

"That is why they are useful," came the calm retort.

"Still, you imply that I am humbugging either you or myself by saying——"

"Exactly; both, I fancy. So you see, I really did convey my meaning."

"But I have told you repeatedly that I cannot meet, or even speak to, Miss Lowther."

"You have never told me why, Mr. Jessop."

The artist's pale face suddenly grew red. He had that boyish trick of blushing which so annoyed Robert Storm, to whose grosser nature a blush was something womanly and weak.

"So now you are deliberately goading me into confession," he cried bitterly.

"I am a rather pronounced sort of gadfly," said the meek Mr. Hunter.

Jessop laughed at that, the laugh of a man torn by conflicting emotions.

"I don't wish to appear an idiot in your eyes," he said after a pause, while Hunter still continued to watch the hoisting of brown sails and the maneuvering of the long oars, or sweeps, with which the fishermen guided their craft through a crooked channel against an unfavorable breeze. "I promised my father on his death-bed never to recognize anyone of

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the Storm blood in any way—not even to speak knowingly to any member of that unhappy family. Heaven help me, what can I do? Miss Eunice Lowther seems to have all the virtues withheld from her race during the past two generations, yet my soul cringes at the notion of refusing my poor father's last request."

Jessop was stumping up and down the small room as this explanation came in passionate gusts of words. He did not see the look of amazement that swept for an instant over the detective's features, nor was he aware of an impulsive movement which almost brought the other from the window, but which was checked instantly, for Hunter had a duty to perform, and he was beginning dimly to see light where hitherto all had been darkness.

"The Storm blood!" said Hunter at last, and his voice was curiously thick and solemn.

"Yes. Unhappily, she is the daughter of David Storm's sister."

"Oh, is that the way of it?"

"Yes, you can now appreciate some part of my distress when I was compelled so many times to let Miss Lowther deem me a boor, a maniac, or even a criminal. I have already broken my bond, in letter if not in spirit, but, no matter what the cost to myself, I shall not err twice in that manner. So, Mr. Hunter, if you would be kind to me, never again urge me to see or speak to David Storm's niece. Let her rather think me an ingrate, a poor, mean-spir-

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ited fellow, a physical coward, afraid of that blustering bully, Storm—anything in preference to the torture of knowing that I am untrue to the charge placed on me by one whom I loved and honored above all men.”

Hunter then faced him. He found words, apparently with an effort.

“I am sorry that you should be moved so deeply, Mr. Jessop,” he said quietly. “Yet I do not regret—having wrung—an explanation from you—so to speak. Perhaps—the future may clear away some of the difficulties. But there—let us leave a painful subject. Did I tell you that I have a nebulous sort of proof of Robert Storm’s presence in Beach House on the night of his uncle’s death?”

“He came there, you remember, while I was dining with—with Miss Lowther.”

Jessop spoke carelessly. He was not vastly interested in the gathering of evidence against Storm, and he was far too agitated by his own rebellious thoughts to notice the detective’s rapid change of topic.

“Oh, the visit I allude to was hours later than that. Here are the links of a thin chain. On the previous night a coastguard named Hewins saw a boat threading its way through that remarkable reef which—Please pardon me, but I *must* refer to it—which you have some occasion to remember as a dangerous place even in sunshine and on a fine day. He ran down the cliff, and hailed its solitary occu-

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pant, just as the man was stepping ashore, whereupon the other put out to sea again as if Hewins had fired at him. The boat, a little craft belonging to an Eskmouth man who supplies boats to visitors, was found at anchor a long way from the harbor on the north side next morning. Obviously, it had been commandeered by someone to whom the coast is familiar. On the following night another boat was taken from the harbor in the same way. But this time the sailor on duty at the coastguard station, having been warned by Hewins concerning the rather odd incident of the previous night, saw the craft creeping out, and ran to the end of the pier. There was not much light, but with his cat's eyes he recognized the oarsman. It was Robert Storm."

"Ah," said Jessop listlessly.

He had the air of being bored. He seemed not to care how many Storms died, or which killed the other: but Hunter was not deceived; he felt that a word from him would quickly change the artist's mood from apathy into a fiery haste to be up and doing.

"I expected you to greet that point with more enthusiasm," he went on dryly. "At any rate, the boat disappeared in the mists to the south, and the time was just half an hour after midnight. At half-past three o'clock the same boat was beached near a farm-house on the coast a mile north of Eskmouth, and Storm leaped ashore. In doing so

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he got wet. It was then nearly full day, and the farmer, who was astir at that hour attending to twin calves—a special event, it seems, in cow circles—saw him wring the water out of his clothing, saw him anchor the boat in the same manner as was adopted on the previous occasion, saw him climb the cliff, and finally, saw him drive off to Hargen Hall in his own dog-cart, which a groom had brought to a grove of trees on the roadside about half a mile inland. There are gaps in the story, of course, but a man charged with a crime is supposed to be able to explain his movements during such very unusual hours as 12.30 and 3.30 A.M., when he borrows a boat without the owner's consent, and abandons it so unceremoniously."

"Does Miss Lowther know this?" asked Jessop with some show of interest.

"N—no."

"Oh, but you should tell her. Please say I was most anxious that she should learn of it. I don't wish to remain blacker in her eyes than I deserve—and, if it can be shown that some other person might conceivably have been hidden in Beach House that night, it is a fact that would count—would help—I mean, seeing that she is the person most directly concerned."

Hunter let the artist end lamely, though it was his habit to assist a broken sentence rather than doggedly await its conclusion.

"I might mention one other fact," he said, when

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Jessop perforce desisted. "That young constable, named Sheldon, whom you have met——"

"A smart young fellow, but conceited," put in Jessop.

"Yes, devilish conceited," and Mr. Hunter chuckled pleasantly—"well, he fancied he saw a boat, with a sail, bearing away from the Black Scar steel soon after Mr. David Storm died. There was a southerly breeze that morning, and the boat used by Storm carried a small sail. Sheldon, by the way, did not tell me that!"

"I wonder why."

"He suffers from swollen head, or fatty degeneration of the heart—I am not sure which—But, for that matter, you never told me that he followed you and Storm up and down stairs, and in and out of rooms, in Beach House when you went there to get the letter for Miss Lowther."

Jessop bounced as though someone had kicked him.

"Will you please say that again?" he demanded.

"Perhaps you didn't know it. Nice sort of house-breaker you are, Mr. Jessop—a real novice and no mistake. Sheldon watched you all that day, watched you climb the rock, with a lantern slung round your neck—by the way, where did you get it? Not in Eskmouth, surely?"

"I have climbed the Matterhorn three times, and there is some rock-work beyond the Hörnli hut which ought to be tackled before dawn, if possible, and

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thus economize time. But go on, man, go on! Sheldon could never——”

“Oh, he did, Mr. Jessop. Bested both you and Storm rarely. He was lying in the big seaward room when you came in through the window, skeleton keys and doors being easier to manipulate than sheer rock. You stubbed your toe on the stairs——”

“I did! I did!”

“Which brought out Robert Storm; even you, wrapped up as you were in your quest, noticed that his bedroom door was open when you came down again.”

“I saw an open door. I did not know it was his, as I had no notion that he was in the house. I thought that, perhaps, some housemaid or caretaker slept there, and I remember being surprised, because it was the room in which David Storm died.”

“Well, he followed you, and might have shot you, had he not stolen the letter from its envelope when you placed it on a table while you were refitting the candlestick.”

“Confound my imprudence! So Robert Storm has it!”

“It was really of little consequence.”

“It was of every consequence. I know the Storm method, man. It was drummed into me from infancy. That letter surely told Eunice—Miss Lowther—where a will, or several wills, could be found.”

“But it was all blank paper.”

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“Blank moonshine! I saw the writing—pages of it—closely written.”

“Moonshine and fiddlesticks are blood relations, Mr. Jessop.”

“I beg your pardon, but I am certain of what I say. Oh, this is monstrous! this is not to be endured! If Storm got the letter he read it, and has already destroyed the will.”

“It may be so—not that it matters much.”

“Do you want to drive me crazy?”

“No, you *are* a bit jumpy to-day, but you’ll be all right in a week. Now, Mr. Jessop, go on with that pretty sketch of yours—the one under the cloth on the easel there—and leave things in my hands. They will come out straight in the end, though they are in a mighty tangle at the moment. Good-day, sir. I am going now to tell Miss Eunice—Miss Lowther—that you are very deeply concerned in her behalf, and wish her to know what I have just told you.”

The sketch so deftly brought in by Mr. Hunter was a very fair drawing of Eunice herself, seated in a skiff and pulling it through a rough sea. Her back was to the on-looker, but her head was turned to watch her perilous path. The artist had caught her eager, valiant expression, and the superb pose of her slight, strong figure was life-like. In fact, he had put on canvas his own vivid glimpse of her as he clung, half-drowned, to the rock.

Under cover of Jessop’s confusion, which was not

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lessened by the detective's adroit use of the girl's Christian name, Hunter made his escape.

He sauntered in the direction of Eunice's lodgings, and thus happened to witness a somewhat curious incident. Robert Storm, making his first appearance in broad daylight for three days, drove up to the house in his dog-cart, threw the reins to a groom, alighted in haste, and hurried into the house. Such was his impatience that he tugged at the bell and turned the handle of the door almost in the same instant.

Jock, who was lying on a mat inside, and enjoying a succulent bone, flew at him without warning, and bit him savagely. Eunice, hearing the racket, came running out, full of scoldings of Jock and apologies to Storm, whose furious kick at the dog had missed, Jock being a clever fighter.

Storm smiled with an exaggerated politeness.

"I am the last man to have Jock punished for guarding you, Eunice," he said. "But call him off now. I don't take kindly to being bitten, and I want to have a word with you."

He entered. Hunter, strolling heavily past, had an eye for the sudden fright in the girl's face. She reminded him of a deer which has been successfully stalked by a tiger. Then the door closed on the pair of them, and Jock's defiant uproar could be heard as he was being banished to the rear premises.

On the opposite side of the road lay a nursery garden, with a man digging, and behind a clump of

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evergreens Mr. Hunter spied flower-beds. He went in, at a moment when Storm's groom was not looking his way.

"You've got some very fine specimens of nemesia there," he said to the digger. "May I examine them?"

"Sure-ly, sir," said the man.

He certainly gave the closest attention to every plant, for he remained there twenty minutes. Meanwhile, he had seen Sheldon patrol the street, with a nod to the groom, and, finally, Storm's reappearance, grim and frowning, to drive off at speed.

"Not the best time, perhaps, to call on a lady," thought Mr. Hunter, "but still, the best time to call."

With that apparent contradiction in terms still running in his mind, he thanked the gardener, crossed the road quickly, and was inside the porch of the cottage before Storm had gone a hundred yards.

He found Eunice in tears—indeed, he had to press his visit very emphatically before she would consent to see him. He did not pretend surprise, but said sympathetically:

"Has Mr. Storm been annoying you, then?"

She looked at him for an instant, those fine eyes of hers blinking like stars through a swirl of rain. Then she dropped into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Mr. Hunter," she wailed, "I am the most miserable woman alive."

Eunice Acts

“Hardly that, Miss Lowther, but calm yourself now, and tell me——”

“It was bad enough this afternoon when that young policeman, Mr. Sheldon, came here and said that he was sending in his resignation, all on my account, it would appear——”

“The rascal! Did he do that?”

Mr. Hunter spoke angrily, but he was far more vexed than he allowed his voice to reveal. Sheldon, firmly hooked, was a capital fish to play, but it was no part of the sport that Eunice Lowther should be worried by him.

“But he said—that you were to blame,” protested the girl brokenly. “He said—he would be dismissed—for undue interference—in the Beach House inquiry—and, rather than endure that, he would resign.”

“Anything else?” inquired Hunter, with a sudden smoothness of manner that would have made his juniors in the “Yard” exceedingly wary.

“Only that he was glad—in a sense—as he would now be free—to devote himself entirely to me—to my interests, I mean. Poor fellow! He can do little, but he means well. Is it true, Mr. Hunter, that you are vexed with him? I don’t understand——”

“No, there is no need to understand. Sheldon has merely been working on your feelings. He is in no danger of being dismissed, and, if he resigns, it will be for personal and somewhat ignoble motives.”

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"But, he built so much on this case, and I have reason to believe that he——"

Eunice stopped. She did not know what to say, for her brain was on fire. Had not Sheldon himself made a great to-do about withholding from Hunter's ken the very fact concerning Jessop which Jessop had so unaccountably revealed? No one seemed to heed the sacrifice *she* had made, but even in this maelstrom of emotions she recollected her compact and kept silence. Hunter, too, helped by his contemptuous gesture.

"Never mind Sheldon, Miss Lowther," he said. "Leave him to me. He will not suffer,—professionally, that is,—though his vanity may receive a shock. Now, tell me what Storm wanted."

"Oh, it is too dreadful. He has got a marriage license. I didn't know such a thing was possible. I thought there had to be publication of banns."

"A special license, you mean."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"But how does that concern you?"

"He—he wants to force me to marry him."

"But this is a free country. He cannot use compulsion. It is ridiculous."

"Oh, Mr. Hunter, he has my promise."

"Ladies are always privileged in being able to change their minds."

Eunice wept afresh at that.

"I cannot marry him—now," she moaned. "I

Eunice Acts

would—kill myself. Oh, I have such wicked thoughts, so I am going away.”

“Going away!” repeated Hunter, quite nonplussed by this sudden twist of circumstances.

“Yes. I feel I can trust you. No one else will know, but I am leaving Eskmouth to-night—for London—for any place where I can hide, and be alone.”

“As a sincere friend and well-wisher, I ask you to do nothing of the sort,” said the detective very earnestly.

“You would not have me die?” she sobbed.

“Heaven forbid!”

“But that is what will happen if I remain here for Robert Storm to torture me. I am powerless against him. He knows that I loathe him—I have told him so, careless whether or not he struck me—yet he persists in urging this marriage, and I have promised—oh, Mr. Hunter, I have promised. He talks of a ceremony to-morrow. I must fly to-night. I must indeed.”

The girl was distraught, and her voice rose to a pitch that threatened hysteria. Hunter, for all his bulk, was tender-hearted, and a woman’s grief invariably unnerved him. He sighed deeply, for he knew that his hand was being forced. Events were shaping themselves admirably to bring about a perfect coup within the next few days, but fate had determined that he should act within as many hours.

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"Very well, Miss Lowther," he soothed her. "Now, you cannot both sit here crying and catch a train to-night—at what time?"

"The mail leaves at ten."

"Then you have only three hours, and you must see to your packing. If I leave you now will you promise to take some tea and go to your room, where you have boxes to pack, you know? You cannot arrive in London in the morning without luggage, eh? That's brave! That's splendid! Dry your eyes and find relief in being busy among your clothes. Will you let me come back here, and see you off, if you really decide on going at the last moment? Oh, by the way—all this excitement makes me light-headed—Mr. Jessop wished me to apologize for his seemingly wild and foolish behavior. He can explain it, I believe, even to your satisfaction, and I have reason to think that he would be most grateful if you gave him a few minutes' interview before you leave."

Eunice could scarce credit her ears, and a surge of amazement through her whole being helped to stem the torrent of her terror and grief. Nor would Jessop himself have been much less disturbed had he heard the extraordinary way in which his words had been adapted.

"Mr. Jessop wishes to come *here*—to see *me*!" she repeated, looking at the big man with her heavy-laden eyes.

"Yes, I am sure of it. May I bring him?"

Eunice Acts

She was practically tongue-tied, quite bereft of calculating power in her intense surprise.

"If you imagine—that such a meeting—will achieve any good purpose——" she began.

"I do. I do most certainly. Now, that cup of tea will work wonders. Keep a good heart, Miss Lowther. What does the old song say: To-morrow the sun may be shining, Although it is cloudy to-day."

And with this unwonted lapse into verse, Mr. Hunter disappeared.

He hurried—yes, actually hurried—to the Rose and Crown. Bad luck! Mr. Jessop was out—for the first time during several days. At the corner of the street a knot of loungers were gossiping, and Hunter was a past master in the art of dealing with the loafer type of humanity.

"You fellows all know Mr. Jessop, the artist, by sight?" he said, addressing them collectively.

"Yes, sir," came the chorus, with wonderful directness for a group of Yorkshiremen, but they scented developments—and beer.

"He went that way a little while ago," said one man, pointing to the harbor and pier.

"Well, there are five of you. I'll give you a shilling each if you separate and look for him, and five bob extra to the man who finds him."

A bombshell could not have dissipated the crowd more quickly. In half an hour Jessop arrived breathless, but in advance there ran a panting man.

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"I found 'im, gov'nor," gasped this Ariel in rags. "I spotted 'im on the sands."

"Six for you," said Hunter joyously, suiting the action to the word.

"Now—what is it—who's dead?" demanded Jessop.

"Come to your rooms a moment," said the calm giant, who had seemingly forgotten his weight in the flurry of life.

"Are you going to arrest me?" asked Jessop, with a little laugh, for he had fought with beasts on those peaceful sands during his lonely walk.

"No, not officially, but you are about to receive your sentence, I fancy, all the same."

The door closed behind them, and Hunter laid a huge hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I take it you are—interested, shall I say?—in Miss Lowther's future?" he said gravely.

"Ah, don't torture me, man. I have had such a struggle with myself——"

"I appreciate that, and so I am here. You believe, of course, that the girl is David Storm's niece?"

"Yes."

"Who told you so?"

"Robert Storm."

"Pity you didn't check his information, though it is probable that good may result from the lie."

"Lie! Who lied?"

"The man who has caused all this commotion."

Eunice Acts

Miss Lowther has not a drop of Storm blood in her body. Her father was an officer in the Indian army, and her mother was a daughter of an Indian judge."

Jessop seemed to grow limp under the presence of that friendly hand.

"Is this the truth, Hunter?" he murmured.

"Absolutely."

"But, Heaven help me, she herself spoke of David Storm as her uncle."

"What else would she call him? Did he not act as a brother to the poor fellow who intrusted his daughter to his care?"

"Ah me! What can I say? What will she think of me?"

"Go and ask her."

"I dare not."

"You must. Robert Storm is pestering her to marry him. He has frightened her by fluttering a special license before her eyes, and it seems that the poor girl has actually promised to marry him, in some extraordinary quixotic sacrifice for your sake."

"Oh, I know, I know!" groaned Jessop.

"She is terrified out of her wits, and, like a timid rabbit darting to a burrow, is planning flight to London by the next train. Go to her——"

"Good Heavens! She will spurn me, and rightly."

"She will not. She expects you. She is waiting for you now."

Jessop quickened into life again. He clutched a hat and would be off, but the detective laughed.

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"Do you know where to go?" he said.

"Ah, do I not? Every night, when the world slept, I have been near her cottage in vigil," and he was gone.

"Gad! isn't it hot!" cried Hunter, producing a spacious handkerchief. "I had no idea the heavy lead was so exhausting a part. So Master Jessop stole a march on Sheldon there, did he? And on me, too, by Jove! I had never a notion that he stirred forth o' nights. Well, well; now to find Sheldon. It is high time that that gay spark of a constable was brought to heel."

CHAPTER XVI

SHOWING HOW EUNICE CAME TO MEET JESSOP

SHELDON was eating his supper when the Scotland Yard man bustled in, filling the tiny room with his fat and breathing.

"Well, Sheldon," said he cheerily, "sent in your resignation yet?"

"It is there," was the quiet answer, with a nod at a neatly written letter lying on the table.

"You really meant it, then?"

"Yes. I suppose Miss Lowther told you."

"That, and lots more. It was mean of you, Sheldon, to scare such a charming young lady with your fairy-tales. She has troubles enough of her own, or she has had them—to be exact."

The other was on the point of resenting Hunter's insinuation when he caught that past tense.

"May I inquire——" he began stiffly.

"Oh, yes. I'm a perfect encyclopedia now on all matters concerning Beach House. In fact, if you'll listen to me a moment, I'll save you the bother of asking questions, which is kind and thoughtful of me, as you cannot know exactly what to ask, and you might blurt out something unpleasant in the mere search for information."

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Sheldon's smaller eye contracted. He was a stubborn youngster, and, having made up his mind to pursue a definite course, was not to be shaken from it easily.

"I have always found you both kind and thoughtful," he said, with a mild sneer in his tone, for the professional cloak still hung on him, and a detective-inspector from Scotland Yard was a personage.

"I'll be a father to you yet," was the dry response. "However, the facts are simple. Robert Storms means to force Miss Lowther to marry him."

"Once I am free to follow my own counsel Robert Storm will be in jail," said Sheldon coolly.

Hunter paid no heed to the jibe.

"In order to avoid the fulfillment of her promise—for she has undoubtedly promised to marry him—Miss Lowther has decided to leave Eskmouth for London to-night."

Sheldon started, but the detective's voice grew positively jovial.

"That would upset all our plans, Sheldon, of course, and when I say 'our' I mean 'yours' and 'mine,' so I have stopped the girl's silly notion by sending to her the man she will surely marry, Douglas Jessop."

"That fellow—never!"

"Fact, believe me. Jessop is David Storm's grandson, and his stupid avoidance of Miss Lowther arose from the equally stupid assumption that she was

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his cousin. He knows now that he was mistaken, so he is explaining matters to her at the cottage."

Sheldon rose, ashen pale, but quite self-contained and resolute. Still, his teeth chattered ever so slightly.

"No hurry," said Hunter pleasantly. "We are going round there in a minute or two. The young people have a good deal to discuss, so they must be given a decent time free from interruption. Now, Sheldon, I propose to take you back into the Beach House inquiry—on terms. No; please listen to me. Tear up that resignation of yours, because you will need to date it afresh. You've lost your head a little over a woman, and greater men than you will ever be have done that. But, for general purposes, your thinking machine is screwed on pretty straight, and the experience you have gained will not be thrown away on you, when, if you take my advice, you apply for, and get, a place in the Yard. I shall recommend you, and what I say there goes a long way. To-night, of course, you are very angry, and sore, and disappointed. But you'll sleep on it, and to-morrow you will report yourself for special duty with me until this affair is ended. . . . Best not say anything now, because you feel like boiling over. . . . But don't take my words as mere hearsay. Just slip on a plain-clothes coat and cap, and come with me to Miss Lowther's place, where we must all help Jessop in persuading her not to run away from Storm."

Sheldon was too crushed by this catastrophic de-

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rangement of his own schemes to trust himself to speak. He took some civilian garments from a hook behind the door, and in a fit of unwonted nervousness he fumbled with some documents which he extracted from the pockets of his uniform coat. They dropped on the floor, and it was pitiful to see his eagerness to conceal them.

Hunter went out and stood in the roadway, so as to give the younger man room to move about freely in the small apartment. No action of his could have been more suggestive. It told the dazed Sheldon that the experienced detective had read his motives like an open book, and needed no explanation of his anxiety to conceal certain closely-written sheets of thin foreign note-paper, sandwiched among the memoranda which had fallen.

A weakling might have done one of two things—in burning the evidence or confessing his lapse—but Sheldon was not a weakling.

Neither man spoke as they walked side by side, in the twilight of tree-lined streets. Sheldon was thinking: "How can I best redeem my transgression?" and Hunter was thinking: "When will he do it?"

The manner of Sheldon's atonement did not appear to be so important as the time, since Hunter felt fairly certain that David Storm's letter to his adopted niece would provide a key that must unlock many doors, while closing one very effectually on Robert Storm, and that one the door of a prison.

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When they arrived at Eunice's cottage both men saw a shadow on the blind of the girl's sitting-room. A man was standing there, with bent head, and a hand extended, pleading, reverent, humble as some devout worshiper before the statued shrine of a saint. It pleased Mr. Hunter to regard the spectacle with levity.

"These artist fellows are beggars to talk," he said. "I'm not sure whether women really like it or not. Perhaps some do and some don't, same as most other things in the world. Now when I had a tiff with Mrs. Hunter in our courting days, the next time I met her I used to say: 'I made an ass of myself the other evening, Mary—give me a kiss,' and all was right as ninepence. But, bless your heart, that scheme wouldn't work with our dainty Miss Eunice Lowther."

Not a word did Sheldon answer, but he quivered, and a weakness as of poisoning seized him that demanded a hard-bitten underlip as an antitoxin. *He* knew how Jessop was talking, and, in Jessop's place, he, too, could have been eloquent. Perhaps Hunter, in his wisdom, felt something of this, and his mild chaff was meant to cauterize the raw wound.

Eunice's landlady was surprised, and a trifle scandalized, at the descent of so many strange men on her modest abode, but Hunter had a ready salve for her in the whispered excuse that they would not be bothering her much longer, while Miss Lowther, when she was again mistress of Beach House, would never

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forget the kindness she had experienced in Laburnum Cottage.

The two men were told to enter, being greeted joyously by Jock. Sheldon darted one haggard glance at Eunice, and saw something in her eyes, though they were red-rimmed with tears, that caused his teeth to clench on his lower lip again. After that, he looked anywhere in the room save at Eunice's face. Hunter, alive to Sheldon's every move, believed he had resolved not to look at her lest some further madness might seize upon him and divert his mind from its new resolve.

The girl herself gave them little time for scrutiny or mental adjustment to changed conditions. She had been sitting in a corner, at as great a distance from Jessop as the room permitted, when the two visitors were announced. Hunter, in his jovial complacency, could not account for that seeming aloofness as readily as Sheldon. He, poor wight, understood, and his lip bled because of the knowledge. These two dared not be close together while words were needed. Jessop had spoken, and the girl had listened, but all the time they were longing for the moment when they might be in each other's arms, and, since explanations had to be given, fully and freely and without stint—well, there was nothing to be done but to keep a table, and a chair or two, and a lamp between them.

But, with the appearance of the detective and his reappointed *aide*, Eunice disregarded the barrier.

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She leaped forward to meet them, with all her old impulsiveness and vitality.

"Mr. Hunter," she cried, "I shall never be able to thank you for what you have done; and you, too, Mr. Sheldon. How thoughtful, how considerate you have been! You knew, each of you, that I was fretting and wearing my heart out because of a mad promise I made to the man who was my uncle's murderer, yet you bore with me until you were able to undeceive me without risk of failure. Mr. Jessop has told me many things to-night, but in none has he been more emphatic than in his testimony to your unwearied patience with both of us. But he, too, is a Storm, and surely, therefore, a little mad, while I have lived so long with a Storm that the wonder would be if I had not picked up some of the family traits——"

"Praise God you have not!" murmured Jessop.

"Oh, but I have," she vowed, and her voice was clear and sweet as a linnet's singing. "You Storms are strong and steadfast, and I think I have shown something of each of these qualities. And you can hate and love to distraction—well, I have plumbed the depths there, too. But I am incoherent and randomness of speech and purpose to-night. To-morrow I shall see you again, and then I can tell you better what is in my heart——"

"You are not going to London by the night mail?" said Hunter, consulting his watch in the most matter-of-fact way.

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“You, at any rate, can humbug me no longer,” laughed Eunice. “Tell that to Mrs. Hunter, will you, and she will understand, or rather, I shall tell her myself. It seems that my visit to London is—deferred——” and she stole a tender glance at Jessop, who looked at her as Pygmalion may have gazed at the goddess whom he never dreamed to see in other guise than unapproachable marble.

“And you will not be afraid of Robert Storm any more?” persisted Hunter, who was watching Sheldon with a third eye.

“No, why should I be, unless I fall a prey to that fear we all have of a monster? But I realize now that it is he who fears. He is afraid of you, Mr. Hunter, and he fears and hates you, Douglas, but the one whom I think he dreads most of all is you, Mr. Sheldon. You, it seems, have tracked him to his lair, but he does not know how or when, so you have added an element of mystery and uncanny stealth to the discoveries that are causing him dis-ease. Yet such a word as ‘fear’ is almost meaningless where Robert Storm is concerned. I pray you beware of him, and do not give him a chance of glutting his vengeance, for he will face death with a steady eye if he can console his evil spirit with the thought that he had spoiled someone’s happiness.”

She addressed the three men, but her secret thought was with Jessop; and Hunter, feeling that the situation was becoming unbearable for one man in the room, resolved to end it.

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"If only we could lay hands on your missing letter, Miss Lowther, we would be able to arrest Storm at once," he said.

Sheldon turned abruptly, and made for the door.

"Good-night, miss," he said, with a half salute, very unlike his wonted smartness. Then, sensitive to a degree, ashamed of making what might savor of a too dramatic exit, he explained it lamely.

"I have to be on duty at six o'clock to-morrow morning," he said, and was gone.

"Come, Mr. Jessop, we must be off also," said Hunter, with a curtness that nearly equaled Sheldon's. Jessop, not unnaturally, looked his surprise, but the detective only consulted his watch again.

"It is of the utmost importance that we should be at the hotel in ten minutes," he said, but he had the grace to walk out alone.

It was a sweet thing for Jessop and Eunice to be in close embrace—if for a few fleeting seconds—to exchange their first passionate kiss—to feel that when their lips met they were banishing forever the malign influences which had shadowed their lives—shadowed them for years without their cognizance, but, during these later days, with all the terror and foreboding of a thundercloud gathering over the hills.

At last they parted, with eager promises of a meeting in the early morning, confident that the sun would smile on their love, and let them wander far afield, in joyous abandon, finding new sympathies and beginning a common history. That is what they

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planned, but this grey old world is a hoary-headed dramatist, and can, when it chooses, introduce most unsuspected kinks in the chain of events.

Perhaps Jessop had an inkling of this soon after he overtook the portly detective striding quickly down the road.

"You are in a deuce of a hurry," he complained, though with that cheery *insouciance* of tone and manner which had so won Eunice when first they met.

"Yes," said Hunter, sparing his breath.

"In more ways than one," continued Jessop. "You hardly allowed me to say good-night——"

"Ha!"

"And 'hum' to you, sir. You sent me there, of malice aforethought, and you shouldn't have torn me away as a drunken man to the lock-up. Well, I *may* be a little intoxicated, but not with rum."

"I pity you if ever you are," puffed Hunter.

Jessop laughed, in a gay bright way that was good to hear.

"You take me too literally, O man of substance," he cried. "But why, like Falstaff, do you lard the lean earth in this manner? What hap awaits us at the Rose and Crown, unless it be a bottle of good wine and the nimbus of smoke, for before you go to bed to-night I shall give you such a halo—— Hello, that is not our way!"

"There will be no wine—and no smoke—and deuced little bed—for us to-night," gasped Hunter in wheezy jerks. "I am going now to rouse Jack-

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son, and send him for that man Wilkins, whose eyes are sharp as a sailor's at night. And the four of us will watch Beach House till daybreak——”

“But why?” demanded Jessop. “If there is anything that can be done, why not let me climb in?”

“This has nothing to do with you,” said Hunter, sinking his voice as he halted outside Jackson's livery stable. “The last round in this fight, or the semi-final, at any rate, rests between Storm and Sheldon. There are elements in this tragi-comedy which you have not sensed as yet. You have been so absorbed in your own troubles that you were deaf and blind to many things that went on elsewhere. . . . Ah, is that you, Jackson? I want you to find Wilkins, and both of you must meet Mr. Jessop and myself at half-past eleven at the corner where the Beach House footpath takes off from the cliff-edge. Bring your overcoats, and a sandwich or two if you are likely to feel hungry. We may be compelled to keep watch there until nearly four o'clock.”

“For goodness' sake!” began Jessop, when they had left Jackson and were walking to the hotel again.

“Yes, I will explain, if you give me your word of honor that anything you may see or hear to-night, or anything I am now going to tell you, will remain a secret during the rest of your days, unless I authorize you to bear witness to it.”

“Comprehensive, but explicit,” said Jessop. “I agree.”

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"You will appreciate my motive when I have finished. Miss Lowther is highly sensitive, and she would be unhappy if she knew that a man had nearly wrecked his life, and had certainly risked it more than once, for her sake."

"You speak in riddles."

Hunter guffawed at the artist's lover-like arrogance.

"Little more than an hour ago I made you a present of the lady. Now you are ready to deny me the privilege of mentioning her name," he said.

"Sorry, Hunter. Go right ahead. I'm a hot-blooded ass, but not such a fool as that."

"Well, that fellow Sheldon has perjured his soul for her. Storm stole the letter twice, once from Miss Lowther, and once from you, but Sheldon stole it from Storm, and has kept it. He has read it many times, and the contents have evidently inspired him to a dodge that is simple in its daring. Without that letter, which Storm must have read, too, remember, no one can stir hand or foot. It will show, beyond doubt, why Storm is so desperately anxious to force Miss Lowther into marriage; it will serve to reinstate her into her lost position; it will help to explain why old David Storm always expected his son to come back, and, consequently, clear up his dying efforts to tell the girl who you were. Now, both Storm and Sheldon have read it, because Storm must have hidden it in the candelabrum, and the battle is for them. Sheldon, poor man, though far below Miss Lowther

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in position, nevertheless dreamed a dream. She, too, is poor now, and, if he could be her savior, if he could show such disinterested worship for her in her fallen fortunes as to win her affections——”

“D—n his impertinence!”

Hunter was annoyed at the interruption, and made no effort to conceal the fact.

“Sheldon is no more impertinent than you in setting his cap at the finest girl he has ever met,” he said, slow and terse.

“You don’t want me to admire him, do you?”

“No, but the poor devil’s case calls for some pity. He has gone crooked, for a woman’s sake, and unless I am greatly mistaken he will try to-night to win back into the straight path again. Anyhow, I have not heard of him running miles across heather and gorse to escape——”

“Oh, chuck it, Hunter! You can’t expect me to regard Sheldon as a long-lost brother. Let it go at that.”

“Well, he will probably take his life in his hands if he enters Beach House by night, for Robert Storm is not one to be caught napping twice, and that is why, Mr. Hot-head, I stopped you from going there again. Of course, I could challenge Sheldon openly, and get the letter by other means. But I want to give him this chance of clearing the slate. It will make a man of him. It will restore his self-respect. And I also want to give him a helping

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hand, if need be. Now, are you coming with me or not?"

Jessop was a trifle taken aback by the warmth displayed by the detective.

"Can we smoke?" he asked flippantly.

"No."

"It will be a miserable undertaking," sighed Jessop, as they entered the hotel, and ordered a belated meal.

Shortly before midnight the ex-gamekeeper, Wilkins, who was acquainted with every rock and hummock on the Beach House estate, had posted the whole party in a hollow where they were perfectly screened from the top of the cliff, yet could command a clear view of the Black Nab promontory. There was no need to separate. They practically overlooked the whole field of operations.

It was a fine, clear night on land, a trifle hazy at sea. Although there was no moon, the sun sank so little below the horizon that in those northern latitudes at no hour could it be said to be dark. The sea resembled a sheet of molten lead, shimmering here and there with strange lights, clouded in parts with wisps of mist, and at times glowing with the red and gold and blue of some exquisite opal.

On the shoreward side the stucco of Beach House showed white against the rock, and its own crest of black slabs of stone on the heavy roof—stone, because tiles or slates would strip dangerously during the fierce gales that swoop down on the Yorkshire

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coast from the northeast in the winter. It was quite impossible for any human being to cross the low-lying neck of land and scale the outer wall of the courtyard without being seen by the watchers, while the displacement of a solitary pebble on the pathway that stretched up the cliff on their right would warn them of anyone's approach.

"May we talk?" whispered Jessop, feeling the silence irksome, for, in his new-found happiness, he wanted, above all things, freedom to move about and deliver his soul of the thoughts that rioted there.

"Better not," said Hunter.

"It's all right, sir," put in Wilkins, with the voice of long experience. "The trick of it is this way. Don't whisper, but talk low, an' always bide your time afore answerin'. Them little waits are wonderful for the ears. The talk seems to give 'em a rest, an' in the waits between you can hear the grass growin', as the sayin' is."

"Is that the way you catch poachers?" asked Hunter.

"Yes, sir. Bless you, it's impossible for any man to come down yon cliff without me knowin' while he's a good five minutes away."

So, with the tense pauses recommended by Wilkins, they beguiled the time with yarns, but never a warning sound reached them from the footpath. Prior to the change from night to day the sea darkened, and its solemn booming came nearer.

"The house is now unapproachable from the

The House of Silence

sands, is it not?" asked Hunter, who was beginning to think that Sheldon would fail him after all, and their long vigil would be wasted.

"It has been that for the last hour or more, sir," muttered Wilkins. "It is not this piece here that blocks the way. There is another nab nearer the town, not so high as Black Nab, but stickin' out farther into the sea—that's where people get caught by the tide. In fact, they do say as it acts as a sort of breakwater for this one, or the neck here would ha' bin cut off long ago by the side-scour."

Another hour passed wearily—it was after half-past two o'clock, and the first white shafts of dawn were rising over a line of silver in the northeast, when a heavy, dull thud smote on their ears. Hunter and Wilkins were the first to leap to their feet. They knew what had happened: a shot had been fired in the interior of the house.

The detective used strong words in his anger.

"He came by the reef, although every other time he has entered the place from the land," he growled, in a rare fret and fume with himself, as they all hurried down the few remaining feet of cliff, and ran along the causeway.

"I wish now you had permitted me to go up the rock," said Jessop, moving easily by the big man's side, and even helping him with steadying hand where the ground was rough, for a fall would have had a serious effect on one of Hunter's bulk.

Showing How Eunice Came to Meet Jessop

“That would have done no good—Storm would have spotted you—and potted you. Now, Jackson, shin over the gate and try the front and side doors, while we arouse someone here.”

“The lodge is empty, sir,” said Wilkins.

“Gad, so it is! What’s to be done. I can never——”

But Jackson had solved the present problem, by opening the big gates from within, and the four ran across the paved and sanded courtyard. They tried the doors. They were locked and bolted. Hunter made no pretense at secrecy, but hammered loudly on the knocker of the front door.

The imperative sounds boomed through the house, and seemed to re-echo from the steep cliff towering darkly beyond the inclosure. Again the iron head of a gorgon clanged its summons to the House of Silence, and Hunter was about to ask Jackson if some spar or crowbar could not be found, when steps were heard coming down the long passage leading from the seaward room.

“Someone is alive in the place,” growled Hunter. “Now, I wonder which of them it is.”

The man inside the house did not question the right of those on the outside to demand admittance so clamorously. He unbolted and unbarred the door, without haste, but without delay. He flung it wide open, but he was in the dark, and they in the partial light, so they could not discern his identity until he spoke:

The House of Silence

“That you, Mr. Hunter?” he asked, and his voice was singularly unemotional.

“Oh, it’s you, Sheldon!” and for once the big man was the worse actor, since the relief in his tone was very marked.

“Yes, sir—who else? Of course, you expected to find me here? I am sorry to have to tell you that Mr. Robert Storm has shot himself.”

“Shot himself!”

“Good Lord!”

“What a thing!”

“Good job, too!”

It is a regrettable fact that Jackson was the man who uttered the last exceedingly uncharitable remark, but his cheekbone was still sore to the touch and his eye discolored. It is to be hoped he regretted his outburst afterwards.

“Yes,” said Sheldon, answering the first speaker only—Hunter. “It was a pure accident, but he is dead, or dying, and he and I were alone in the house, because to-night he sent away even the old woman who waited on him. I’m glad you are here, sir. I feel rather done. We had a struggle first. But come in, and we will get a light. Then I can show you what happened.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLOSING SCENE

WHEN Sheldon rushed away from Eunice's presence he felt like a man half-strangled in a noose of his own contriving. The girl's unstinted gratitude had smothered him with self-reproach. Instead of being her friend, as she fancied, he had acted as her deadliest enemy.

None knew better than he how painful had been her experiences during the past week. Fallen from the dignity and unconscious pride of place that were the prerogatives of David Storm's accepted heiress, she had shrunk from the covert sympathy of the chief inhabitants of the little town, and the blunt regrets expressed by the outspoken trades-people and fisher-folk. She could not help being aware of the attention she attracted during her few walks abroad, and, to one of her high-strung temperament, it seemed as if everyone in Eskmouth must be discussing her, and repeating the gossip and tittle-tattle that would surely arise when her visit to Hunt Hill farm became the common property of women's tongues.

He, too, had a fair share of the super-sensitiveness of unfledged genius. For every minor pang that

The House of Silence

Eunice had suffered he now endured a dozen, for his own conscience reviled him as an ingrate, and whipped him with scorpions.

This mood boded no good to Robert Storm. When the policeman flung into his lodgings it was not to seek the rest needed if he were to be fit and well for a long day's work on the morrow. No; at first he yielded to black despair, but soon the man's strong character asserted itself. He ate a hearty meal, not because of appetite, but as a preparation for the demands that would be made that night on his physical endurance.

Taking a leaf out of Storm's book, he stole out about midnight, and sauntered to the harbor. There he took a boat from its moorings alongside a deserted staith, or broken-down quay, and pulled out to sea. He wore a blue jersey and a sou'wester, and, although he was seen, owing to the vigilant watch enjoined on the coastguards by Hunter, he passed easily as a fisherman going out to his lines or lobster-pots.

The night was calm, and the sea singularly smooth, so the way across the reef was not wholly impracticable to one who had often marked its intricacies in the full glare of noon. He proceeded cautiously, and by dint of bumping against rocks and trying new channels where the water looked deep, he wound his way inshore until he lay close to the base of the Black Nab.

There he anchored the boat in a little lagoon of

The Closing Scene

the reef, floundered through the few remaining feet of water, and reached the rock.

High above towered the stark wall of the Black Nab, but it held no terrors for him on this still night, when a phosphorescent radiance from the sea lighted each upward step of a path which was hardly perilous to a skilled cragsman.

Indeed, at this moment, he did not greatly care if his foot slipped and he fell back, crushed and maimed, to be drowned when the incoming tide lapped the boulders on which he was standing. At least, he would have striven to retrieve his fault. If he failed, the girl whose glamor had won him from the narrow way of duty, might guess, perchance, why he was found there, while a few short months would restore to her the inheritance of which she had been robbed, and she was safe in the meantime from that marauder, Storm.

But he did not mean to fail—at any rate through a blunder of hand or foot. The real danger would be faced, he knew, when he had scaled the summit and was free to enter the house. Within, he might have to encounter a strong and dangerous man, a sort of modern buccaneer tainted with lunacy, who, to suit his own ends, would stamp on him with no more compunction than if he were a beetle. An odd thought came to the stout-hearted policeman when he took the first upward grip of the granite. Poor old David Storm had written of the influence of the moon on maniacs. At what period was the moon potent—at

The House of Silence

full or in wane—in perigee or apogee? He could not recollect. So curiously constructed was the man's mind, and so intent was he on self-tuition, that he resolved to clear up the point if ever his sober senses blunted his present sufferings.

It was ten minutes past one when he began to climb the rock. Ten minutes later, for his ascent was slow and sure, he was crouching in the crevice which had contained the will in chiseled stone. Once already had that niche given him salvation, and now it was destined to shield him from death a second time.

A window was open in the semicircular room, and Sheldon was regaining his breath after the arduous exertion of scaling sixty feet of rock when Storm suddenly thrust head and shoulders through the casement. The movement was quick and sinister, and the stark, lined face showed clearly against the Rembrandt shadows of the background.

But a man looking forth from a lofty eminence over the sea at night, looking darkly and secretly for the expected which is yet nothing more than a fantasy, will almost inevitably glance first at the great mirror spread before his visitor. Even Robert Storm obeyed the general law, and his thought was probably more of the reef than of the actual way up the precipice.

In the moment's respite thus vouchsafed, Sheldon pulled the sou'wester over his white face and doubled his hands out of sight. He believed, he hoped, that

The Closing Scene

if the gleam of his skin was hidden the rest of him might merge sufficiently with the black rock to remain unseen.

Strange tremors shook him during the full minute that followed. He dared not unveil his eyes, but he felt Storm's dour gaze piercing the gloom, felt it blighting and scorching him as a prelude to the sheet of flame and shock of flying lead that would mark his being discovered and fired at. But the seconds passed, and there was no sound beyond the plash of the sea far beneath, and the wild whistle of a flight of geese winging their way to a moorland lake many miles inland.

At last his ears, strung to the tension of agony, caught Storm's retreating footsteps, and he ventured to peep over the brim of his oilskin. He was clammy with perspiration, but his heart was strong, and his overwrought nerves were rejoicing now in the more natural demands of physical daring.

He realized how narrow had been his escape. If Storm had peeped out a few minutes earlier he must have seen the boat now hidden by the outward bulge of the rock. Then he would have waited, like some grim spider, for the victim that would shortly enter his web.

But even while his mind ran riot, Sheldon was moving. He crept up, not to the open window, but to its neighbor. The room was empty. Through the open door in the center he could look into the blackness of the corridor, half to the lower floor and half

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to the upper, with the landing and complete turn of the stairs visible.

The door of Storm's room was ajar, and a faint gleam of light came from it. To endeavor to get in now through the open window would be to court death, so Sheldon boldly determined on a reconnoitering move to a flank.

The room in which David Storm died, and which was now the bedroom of the man who, in all likelihood, caused his death, lay to the right, so Sheldon, who was master of every inch of the seaward side of the house, edged and groveled like a shadow round the semicircular front and along the straight wall of the side until his eyes were glued at a chink between blind and window-frame.

Storm was seated, fully dressed, with his back to the window. On a table near the door lay a revolver. Obviously, he was on guard, his ear alert for any sound in the house, and, as Sheldon had good cause to know, he didn't trust to his ears when it came to watching the sea.

But the opposite door, of the room where Jessop had slept, was open, too, and Sheldon had a thrill of real joy when a new plan entered his head.

Back he went to the front, and stuck the sou'-wester, with its gray lining upward, in a spot where it could not fail to be seen from the window. Then, with stealthy speed, he hastened to the opposite side of the house, and posted himself, pocket-knife in hand, at the window of the other room. It was a des-

The Closing Scene

perate chance, but he took it. He could see his way into the house now, and he would trust to his own ingenuity to find a way out, for he might be able to manipulate locks and bolts to get out, but never to get in unheard.

After a seemingly interminable wait, which he might have known would be trying to others than himself had he been positive of that which he only suspected—in effect, that Hunter and Jessop were not asleep in their beds that night—his patience was rewarded. Storm rose to inspect his seaward defenses.

Sheldon set his teeth. Now was his time. When Storm left the room, revolver in hand, the man without, clinging like a fly to a window-sill on the south wall, could neither see nor hear. But he had a clever brain, that could fit itself into other men's minds; and he trusted to the angry stupor that would seize on Storm when he saw that telltale cap.

With a deft thrust of the knife-blade, Sheldon pushed aside the latch, and the window swung open. Now he was in the room, and the window was closed. Now, with thievish feet, he was at the door, all an ear. He caught a gruff curse from Storm's lips, and heard the scraping of a foot on the parquet floor as its owner leaned far out to pry and peer.

That was Sheldon's opportunity. He whirled across the landing and was up the stairs with the silent flitting of a ghost, not omitting to draw the door to its former angle. His objective was the music-room.

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He meant to put back that much sought-for letter in the hiding-place where alone it was known to have been for certain. Hunter would find it there in the morning, since Robert Storm would surely be arrested then, and Hunter would understand that a man who had erred had made restitution.

Sheldon was proud and self-contained. He would have died rather than admit his lapse, but if his colleague and superior thought fit to treat him as one who had won redemption he would try and justify in the future the faith that was reposed in him.

He had no difficulty whatever in carrying out this essential part of his undertaking. Storm was far too perturbed by the sight of the sou'wester, lying where it could not have lain when last he looked through the window, to dream of abandoning the seaward room immediately in order to search the rest of the house. Sheldon counted on that, but he did not fully reckon with the difficulty of readjusting the pieces of ormolu and porcelain, when he had groped for and found the candelabrum, a light being out of the question. Several times he had the main screw almost in its place; but it would slip exasperatingly, and once the whole thing crumbled in his hands, while a lump of metal fell with a clang on top of the piano.

In that quiet house the sound was magnified ten-fold, but it crashed a thousand-fold in Sheldon's heart, which thumped so against his ribs that he could hear it. With the calmness of desperation he tried again, and this time the ornament took shape

The Closing Scene

and solidity without any hitch. So, then, having accomplished the major part of his purpose, he tiptoed to the door and listened.

All was still. The corridor was so dark that it might be peopled with a troop of specters: but it was not the gibbering shapes of night and the grave that Sheldon's stark gaze sought while moving side-long, close to the wall, until he reached the stairs.

There, apparently, all was as before. For what he could tell, Storm might be out on the rock, seeking vengefully for the owner of the sou'wester. At any rate, he must either advance or retreat—to hesitate while in the small area lit by the borrowed radiance of the lamp in Storm's room would be a folly not to be looked for in a brave man like Sheldon.

He was half-way down the first flight of stairs when the promptings of a sixth sense made him wary of the big clock that stood in a recess of the landing. He paused, irresolute, took another step, and a dark form sprang into demoniac activity from behind the clock. Sheldon felt, rather than saw, a raised revolver, but now that his life hung by a thread, as it were—a thread that might snap in a fraction of a second—he leaped forward and down, his hands flew out like claws, his left hand caught and held a bony wrist, and his right closed on a big firm throat.

Instantly the revolver clattered to the floor, a right arm more powerful than Sheldon's left wrenched itself free, he felt two strong arms closing around him, his adversary turned slightly to the left, clicked his leg

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on the inside below the calf, and Sheldon had perforce to abandon his hold on the other's throat if he would avoid the barbarous and unscientific "chip," or wrestler's stratagem, known as the "hank."

Sheldon was a sportsman, bred, as has been seen, in Cumberland, and his gorge rose at the notion that he, a trained "fratcher," should be subjected to such an obsolete attack. But the hank is none the less dangerous if old-fashioned, and he had to throw himself forward with lightning-like rapidity, grip with both arms, and back-heel his opponent if he would save himself from being crushed into insensibility against the stairs.

"Fight fair, man!" he hissed, as he tried the inside click, but encountered a frame seemingly composed of steel and hickory.

"Fair, you fool!" growled Robert Storm, "you are a dead man—fair or foul matters little to you!" and Sheldon received the electric preliminary of the chest stroke, or jerk off the breast, which can only be practiced by a tall and powerful man. He yielded a little, arching back and shoulders, met strain with strain, and the muscles of the two tautened like whipcord.

They were at the very summit of effort when Sheldon's left foot slipped on a yielding carpet. The accident would have cost him dear had not Storm's foot also caught in the rucked-up material. Neither man could save himself. Still locked in each other's arms, they pitched headlong down the stairs into the

The Closing Scene

lower corridor, where were situated the dining-room and drawing-room.

Being well matched, for Sheldon rather more than made up in science and quickness for Storm's superiority in strength and weight, they rose to their knees simultaneously, sprang upright in the same fierce rivalry, and were at it again on the somewhat wider floor of this main passage without so much as a second's cessation.

And now Sheldon began to understand that his ruthless adversary was pursuing new tactics. Finding that his own knowledge of wrestling was not sufficient to permit of his bodily advantages turning the scale in his favor, Storm commenced to impel the younger man toward the dining-room door. Sheldon did not know, until the fact became patent afterwards, that the door was open some ten or twelve inches. But he did realize that Storm meant to force him into that room, and it is no bad generalship to put your enemy into the position which he obviously wishes you to occupy.

Some instinct told him that there was one wrestling chip which Robert Storm was not aware of, and that one of the neatest and most graceful, if such terms may be applied to a trick which stretches a man at full length with the last ounce of breath knocked out of his lungs. Of course, all that Sheldon wanted now was liberty. The strain was beginning to tell on him; if he slackened or weakened for an instant Storm would surely kill him, and

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perhaps end the business artistically by flinging him down the face of the cliff. If only he could incapacitate Storm for a few minutes he would hie safely away from that house of death, so he gathered his utmost resources for a supreme and irresistible attempt at achieving the "hipe."

As it happened, the position of his arms and body was favorable for its success. His right arm was braced against Storm's ribs under the left arm, and he felt that Storm would mistake the initial move, which consists in twisting an opponent to the left, for a further yielding in the direction of the dining-room. The artifice would be foolish, perhaps fatal, if Storm was prepared for it, and met it in the approved manner by back-heeling: but Sheldon felt extraordinarily confident, and confidence plays no small part in a life-and-death struggle.

When, therefore, he judged himself ready, he gave way ever so little. Storm perceived the retreat, and pressed his apparent advantage. Then Sheldon threw his very soul into the swinging of Storm's huge frame sideways; he lifted him clear of the floor, forced his left leg high with the right, and threw him violently against the dining-room door. They were so near that Storm's head struck the paneling at the same height as though he had butted into it in the dark, and this might have proved a serious mishap for Sheldon, since the violence of the fall would be much reduced thereby; but at the instant of the impact a red flame filled

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the room with fire, and a shot rang out with appalling din.

Heard from without, it was a mere thud of sound: heard by Sheldon within the narrow confines of the room, it was harsh and ominous as thunder on a mountain top.

Storm fell, exactly as Sheldon intended that he should fall, but the victor's uncertain feet, already breaking into a run for the front door, halted when his dazed mind took in the meaning of that sinister flame and report. At first, he believed that someone had come to his assistance. But that fleeting notion vanished in the alarming recollection that Storm meant to force him through that door-way, the speedy sequel of thought showing that the shot had probably been fired at him and not at the man whom he believed to be lying prostrate across the threshold of the room. Somehow, too, he fancied that Storm had really been shot, and he was staunch and plucky enough to refuse the tempting chance of safety that now offered itself.

"Who is there?" he said. . . . "I am Police Constable Sheldon. . . . Who is there?"

His voice was harsh and strange in his own ears, and it reverberated through silent corridors and empty rooms with a weird resonance that shook him to the marrow.

Silence. The smell of gunpowder reached him, and it was almost comforting, since it proved that he was not imagining vain things.

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Feeling himself horribly unprotected and defenseless, he suddenly raced up the stairs and secured the fallen revolver, which was loaded in every chamber, as he could see by a fleeting glance at it in the light streaming from Storm's bedroom.

Then the loud rat-tat of the knocker startled and cheered him, but he had to go warily past the unknown perils of the dining-room, and, because of that very caution of movement, his acute brain evolved the theory that Storm himself had constructed some infernal device whereby any person entering or leaving the room without prior warning would be shot in the body.

Thus, when the second knock came, he walked openly and carelessly along the passage, and had no hesitation in telling the excited men he found in the courtyard that Robert Storm had shot himself accidentally.

That was true, literally, though a jurist might cavil at the phrase. But Sheldon was wrong in one important respect—Storm was not dead.

When Jessop had switched on his little electric lamp, which he had brought with him and actually forgotten in the excitement until Sheldon spoke of getting a light, they found Storm lying on his back, motionless, save for a strange twitching, but very much alive if the testimony of his sullen gleaming eyes might be credited.

Jackson telephoned for a doctor, while the others carried Storm to his bedroom and laid him on the

The Closing Scene

bed from which his uncle had risen to meet death. Beyond endeavoring to stanch a comparatively slight flow of blood from a wound in his back, they attempted no examination of his injuries. They were all impressed by his remarkable rigidity, but it was not until Dr. Ransom arrived that they grasped its significance. A bullet was imbedded in the unhappy man's spine, destroying nearly all the motor and sensory nerves of that foundation of the human body. In a word, Storm might live a considerable time, but he would never move a limb again, and, in all probability, he had lost the power of speech as well.

The cause of the disaster was soon laid bare. An antiquated pistol, provided with a hair trigger, was fastened to a heavy bronze group on a sideboard in such wise that a packing-thread stretched tight by the further opening of the door would fire it.

Hunter discovered the weapon, which was single-barreled. He examined it.

"A family relic, since it bears the letters H. S.," he said.

"It is of Venetian make," put in Jessop.

Sheldon heard, and turned very pale. He understood, but he remained mute as to his knowledge, but he seemed to feel that "glow of cold eyes in the grave" which David Storm had chuckled over in anticipation. The malignant clause in the will had operated most effectually, for two copies of the will were secreted in the dining-room, and Robert Storm

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had constructed the man-trap to protect them from Jessop!

The letter was found, and Hunter and Sheldon, comparing notes in a guarded official way, were able to supply nearly every detail of the double tragedy which had chosen peaceful and secluded Beach House for its stage.

But, after all, Eunice supplied the missing chapters of the story. After a week's careful nursing, though surgeons declared that the bullet must never be extracted, since it could accomplish no further local mischief, whereas any degree of probing would certainly bring about death, Robert Storm commenced to utter queer choking noises.

The girl came to him, sweet-voiced and forgiving, pitiful to tears at seeing a strong man so cast down and broken, and her gift of reading expression and interpreting those unintelligible sounds soon filled every gap in the theory evolved by the police.

Storm had not actually killed his uncle. He had climbed into the house, and had endeavored to frighten the old man into revealing the whereabouts of the will, or wills, thinking that if he secured the documents, forthwith, David Storm might be deemed by a court of law incapable of making testamentary dispositions. In his rage at being unable to make head or tail of the paralytic's speech, he had used him brutally, half choking him, and letting him drop

The Closing Scene

on the floor—whereupon had come an eldritch shriek from the atrophied throat.

Alarmed by the sound of Jessop's movements in the neighboring room, and having every wish not to be seen in that house where he was so unwelcome, Robert Storm darted into the room on the sea front.

He was amazed at finding that Jessop, and not Eunice, came from the opposite door, and when the artist was looking at David Storm—a prey to the disgust and annoyance that seized him when he discovered that he had unwittingly disobeyed each of his father's dying injunctions—the truculent Robert coolly entered Eunice's room, locked the door, ransacked her boxes, found the letter, though he was hunting for a will, and took away some of her trinkets to cover the more important theft. In fact, all of the jewels were brought to her intact from Hargen Hall, when the crippled man had succeeded in telling her their whereabouts.

As Sheldon had guessed, he entered by the seaward room's casement, and left the house by the other—climbing the rock on each occasion.

He also told her why he had substituted the letter for the will in the candelabrum, and he seemed, in his odd way, to chortle over his own villainies, while he did not hesitate to assure her that, with Sheldon vanquished, he would have married her in spite of everything. At that she would shake her head with a little smile, in which there was some touch of sadness, for she was tender-hearted and sad for him,

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and she could not help contrasting her happy hours passed on moor and cliff with her lover while this corsair of a man lay there a helpless log.

Within two months Sheldon came to bid her good-by, on his appointment as a probationer in the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard. He had the tact not to ask to see Storm, now established in the big room on David Storm's couch, but when she held out her hand to him he stooped and kissed it, at which she grew very hot and flurried; with great discretion, she forgot to mention the incident to Jessop.

A month later Robert Storm died, and was buried with his people, and Jessop awoke to the astounding fact that he was his rival's heir, and Storm was a wealthy man.

He sold Hargen Hall, and Eunice and he approved an architect's plans for the complete reconstruction of Beach House while they went abroad for an extended honeymoon.

On the day of their departure from Charing Cross, Jackson, who was taking their car by easy stages to Paris, came to see them off. He was accompanied by Sheldon and Inspector Hunter.

In response to their inquiries, Sheldon said he was devoted to his profession, and would not leave it on any account; but Hunter, too old for the glamor of thief-hunting, and waxing very fat again, said confidentially:

“Eskmouth did me more good in a week than a

The Closing Scene

whole year of Turkish baths. I'm retiring soon, so you'll find me up there when you return. Yes, indeed, ma'am, I lost twenty pounds in seven days. Why, after a month of it, I'll be skipping about those sands like a lamb."

"If you do that, Inspector, you will enliven the whole town," said Eunice.

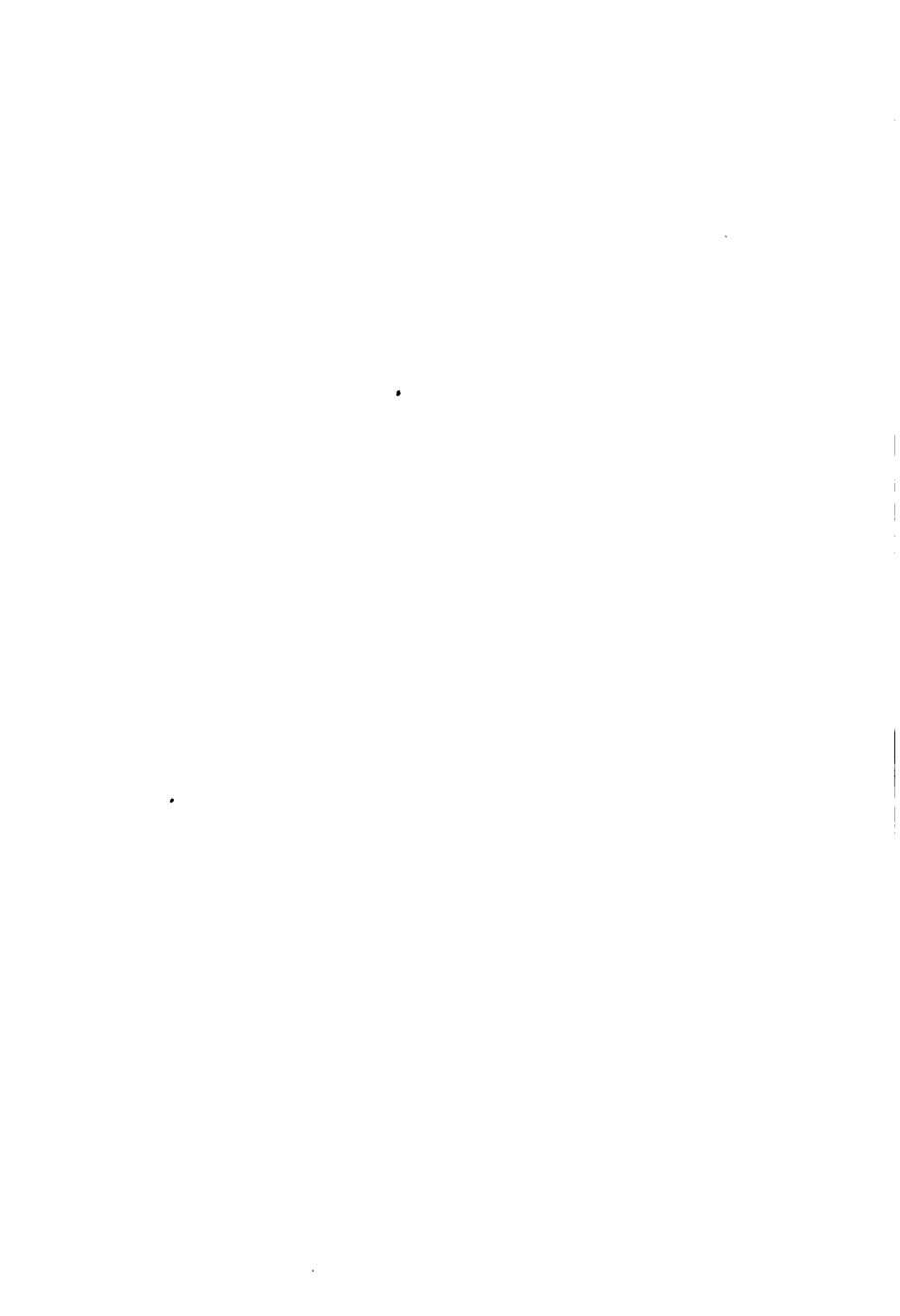
Jessop laughed, for any quip of hers was good in his ears just then, and the train moved away; and their smiling faces were lost for the time.

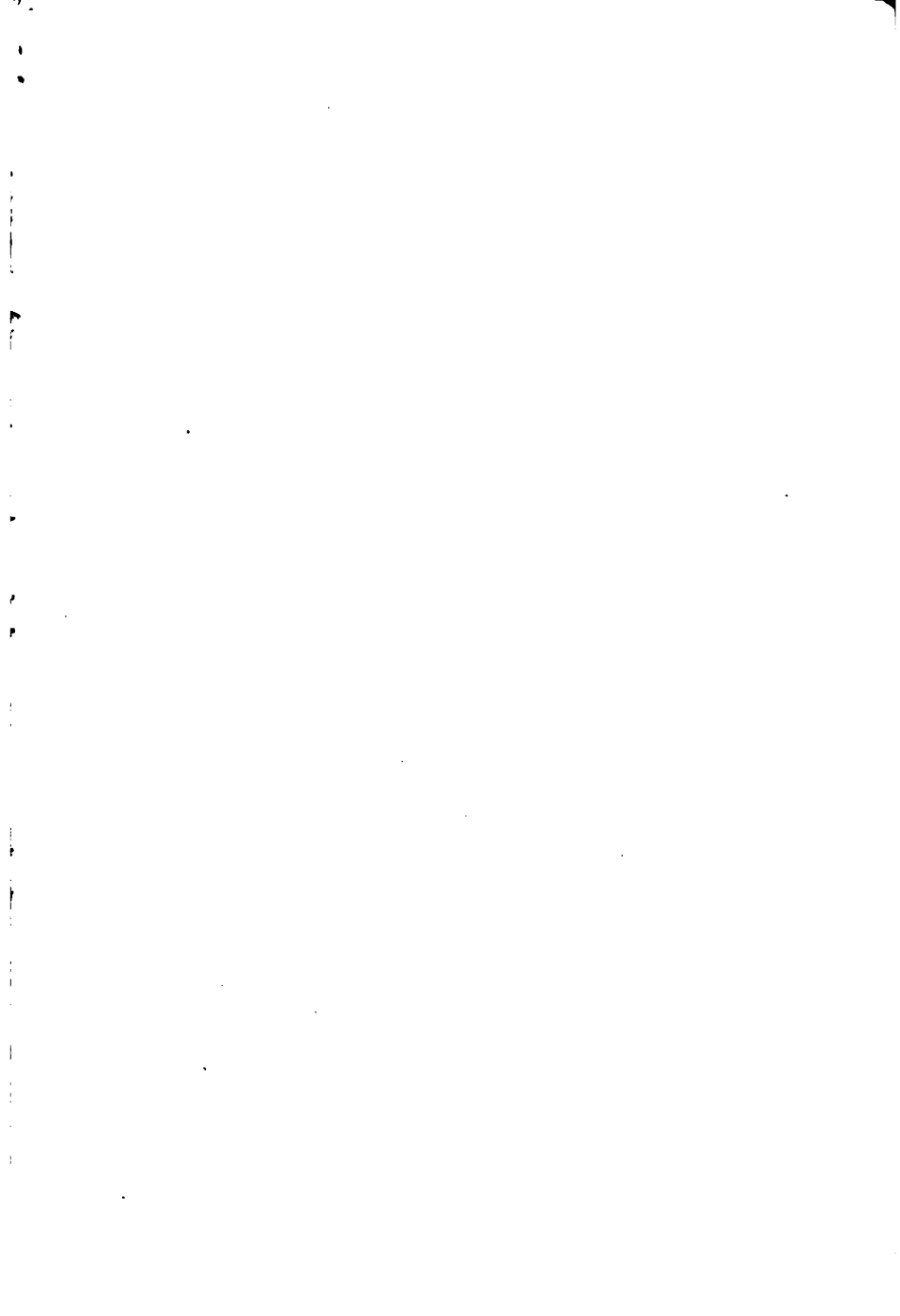
"Lucky dog!" cried Hunter. "The nicest girl——"

Sheldon clenched his hands in his pockets, but his tone was severely bureaucratic when he said:

"By the way, sir, with reference to that Bond Street jewel robbery, I heard to-day——"

THE END





MAR 27 1912

JUN 6 1912
JUN 22 1912

JUN 24 1912

JUN 26 1912

JUN 28 1912

